



EELIE '19

# For Wildness and Anarchy

## Kevin Tucker

*Revised and Expanded Second Edition*

For Wildness and Anarchy

Also by Kevin Tucker

*Gathered Remains:  
Essays on Wildness, Domestication,  
Community, and Resistance*

*The Cull of Personality:  
Ayahuasca, Colonialism, and the Death of a Healer*



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*Birds are free until people cage them.*  
- Fredy Perlman,  
*Against His-Story, Against Leviathan*

For the wild messengers  
and their roaring stillness,  
leaving the keys behind.

To Natasha, Rev, and Zander:  
For loving the Earth to the sky and back.

To Mica and Dyani:  
That you may remain forever uncaged.



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# Introduction to the Second Edition

For wildness and anarchy.

Over time, critiques deepen. Terms can be amended and expanded upon. When you're dealing with something as involved and far-reaching as civilization, there are a lot of moving pieces. That's why it has always been important to me to put what I'm fighting for front and center: wildness and anarchy.

The title ought to make it clear that this is the baseline of this book, and also the foundation of all my work that has come since. Wildness is intently different from wilderness. Like primal anarchy, it's a flowing reality—one that has shaped who we are as a social animal. It's not about a place in time, it's not a location: it's the wild spirit of the world.

Wildness, like primal anarchy, is also something better understood in complexity than strictly defined. The more we try to tamp it down into simple definitions, the more we are going to necessarily reduce it into a concept to box up. Steps that help it become a plaything for marketers and gurus.

For everything civilization has thrown at and torn from this world, it is the persistence of the wild, the untamable aspects of our primal anarchy, which inspire me.

The world that we live in—the world that civilization has carved into the Earth's flesh, that technology accelerates, that colonization forces into its grasp, that warfare decimates and divides—remains under assault. The path that we have been set upon through domestication, the narratives of progress that have long been whispered into our ears and plastered before our eyes, all of this is to conceal

that part of ourselves that begs for wildness.

It's all meant to cover up our need for community and our visceral distaste for authority.

Civilization is a history of failed attempts to bury our hunger for a life without work, without sales pitches for meaning and purpose. We reach for perfection and miss that the most egalitarian and sustainable societies that have ever existed—those of nomadic hunter-gatherers—are written into our bones and minds.

We have been sold substitutions for life piecemeal. We work for them. We pay for them. We impose them upon others and pat ourselves on the back when we feel we have succeeded.

We see our story as a linear path: perpetual conquest becomes an accepted part of our reality.

Dissecting that narrative is the core of this book. These essays can remind us of the realities of the civilization that we live in, or possibly awakening us to them for the first time. When the narratives of domestication work, then a living history can be buried in plain sight. We live within the remnants of a world under attack, surrounded by monuments preemptively proclaiming victory in an often one-sided battle. The stories we are told are a patchwork of bravado and hubris. When you pull the strings, all of it comes undone.

My goal is to strip civilization of its clothes: to expose it.

The essays in this book, written between 2000 and 2010, take on a number of different voices and approaches with that momentum. Some feel raw, others more refined. Taken as a whole, they cover much of the full span of anti-civilization critique.

From here, it unfurls in many directions. There is no aspect of civilization that should be spared of shredding its mythology and attacking its ongoing processes. The flow of power remains tethered to a finite Earth. The systems in place to keep that power moving morph in form and intensity, but they follow the same patterns that civilization always has. History doesn't repeat itself; these old wounds just remain open.

And the world we face now is in many ways cataclysmically worse.

None of the warnings were heeded. Nothing was learned from mistakes of the past. There have been moments where it felt like a reckoning was coming. We were almost going to address climate change and endemic die-offs, but those efforts were diluted into

symbolic policy proposals. Our world is on fire: flooding in regions, parched and on fire in others. Wars continue unabated as we once again teeter closer to nuclear war. Children continue to suffer the worst of it all.

For those of us who have known what to look for, there is no satisfaction in being right. There is no moment where a prediction coming true feels at all hopeful or satisfying. The point was never to prophetically portray what was to come, but to voice a carrión call that we have the power and agency. We can do something about this.

The world has always fought civilization. The world is struggling. The wild remains.

That is why I put what I'm for upfront.

It's not enough to be a critic. It's not enough to hope that some catalogue of decline will find its place amongst our impending ruins. It's never enough to just take in all of the destruction and watch it unfold.

We are still here. The Earth is still here.

Realizing our place in this world guarantees nothing. Feeling our part both in the destruction of life and perseverance of it offers no safety net. No parachute. No bail out and no bug out bag. But it gives us the chance to feel that life. To struggle alongside it: to fight back.

It is vital to never lose sight of what is at stake, at what is being lost and destroyed in this world: our home, our planet, our lives, the lives of those we know and those we will never know. It is my goal to expose the foundations of civilization. In doing so, we can also find our own grounding in this world.

Hands in the soil, feet on the Earth: unearthing the realities of power, of civilization, should make you feel. And feeling is what leads to action. Not for ideologies, not for philosophies, but for that wild spirit of the world that beckons.

For wildness, for anarchy: we have nothing promised to us in this life.

Yet this life carries on, impatiently awaiting our return.

One way or another, we are agents in this world on fire. How will you use yours?

If you've encountered the first edition of this book, which came out in 2010, then you might notice considerable changes for this mas-

sively revised edition.

When I first compiled these essays—many of which had been printed and distributed thousands of times—I wanted to remain true to how they had originally been presented. I didn’t change them much. In hindsight, not making many necessary corrections or ironing out difficult and rough passages was a mistake: hence this version.

Some essays in the original version didn’t age as well, so they were removed and others were updated where necessary. A few new ones have been included along with an interview I did with *The Fifth Column* from 2015, which should round out the insights in this book.

I wish a number of topics in this book would have lost relevance over time, but sadly they have not. Along with a resurgence in fascism, a bleakly unaware socialism is also on the rise. Internet culture has given Ted Kaczynski—as an icon and as an ideologue—a new audience. I’m far less forgiving of his quirks now than I was in 2005.

Nearly everything written about technology here was written before social media and cellphones became the predominant means of communication and, worse, interaction with the world. My references to TV seem almost quaint in comparison, but the critiques only become more potent.

There are many aspects of this book that I would approach differently now—it’s clear where I’ve grown as a writer and developed as the critiques unfold. I’ve spent plenty of time elaborating a more developed and nuanced analysis of civilization in my recent books, *Gathered Remains* (2018) and *Cull of Personality* (2019), as well as a number of books currently in the works.

That conversation manifests in the pages of *Wild Resistance: A Journal of Primal Anarchy*, which I founded in 2015 as *Black and Green Review*. If any of this is of interest, I assure you that all of those projects and books will be too.

All told, I went to lengths to make sure that the essays in this book are the best versions they could be. I owe a great thanks to Jessica Carew Kraft for her commitment in helping me through that elaborate process. The extent to which this reads smoother is largely due to her watchful eye and guidance, alongside the careful eye of Keith Blunt.

There are some corrections that I was eager to make. For years

I had been making the effort to say gatherer-hunter over hunter-gatherer: a well-intentioned move that was intending to correct male biases, but ultimately negates the role that hunting plays within hunter-gatherer societies, as well as the role women play in hunting and fishing, and the importance meat, fish, and fowl hold within these societies.

In attempting to flip the perspective, I fear that it unfortunately upheld the imposed tiered hierarchies we've already imposed upon Indigenous societies. That's an error I don't take lightly.

Around 2004, I started talking about *primal anarchy*. In the time since, I have increasingly moved away from the term *anarcho-primitivism* towards an embrace of primal anarchy on its own. There are a number of reasons for this—elaborated in the essay “To The Captives” from *Wild Resistance* no 6. They include a reckoning with the fact that I wasn't using the word *primitive* without quotes or clarifiers for well over a decade already, but also the fact that *primitivism*, as a term, lacked any real reference point other than historical. I have long felt that the anarcho-primitivist critique had outgrown its questioning stage and that we have found enough discernible answers and roots to assert ourselves more clearly.

Primal anarchy, in this light, is less about what *had* happened, but what *is* happening. The critique isn't about a fall from grace, but a realization that we were born to be nomadic hunter-gatherers. The narrative of domestication has always required a notion of social evolution, an effort to make concrete the idea that we have passed the point of no return. To make us feel like we collectively made a choice, and that civilization won.

It hasn't. It won't.

Civilization has always been resisted. Always. At no point did anyone in any society ever just simply accept the narrative and carry on. We adapted—considerably too much. We take part in the destruction of our home, our Earth, and all life upon it.

But it has always been within our grasp to change that. We may be the last to realize this, but it doesn't change our reality.

Undoubtedly, we are where we are now. The world, as we all see and feel it, remains in a state of complete and utter free-fall. Once we begin to undermine those narratives, once we begin to see beyond them, then maybe—just maybe—we'll begin to see that others have survived civilization.

Despite everything civilization has done to this world, I'm hop-

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ing the Earth is far more adaptive than we have been.

In spite of it all, wildness still awaits our return.

Far too many people have had a hand in helping me and pushing me over the years to thank here. Any list would necessarily be incomplete. So to everyone who has helped, I give my eternal gratitude.

I acknowledge that the entirety of this book was written and compiled on stolen land. Doing my best to recall where everything was written at, but that includes lands of the Očeti Šakówin, Osage, Lenape, Monongahela, DWJ&9J& Tsalaguwetiyi, Mvskoke, and probably countless others.

I will never stop fighting.

For wildness and anarchy,

KT

June 2019

# Introduction to the First Edition

Much has changed over the last decade since these essays were written. The ideas of green anarchists and anarcho-primitivists have deepened and matured. The topic of civilization—much less the understanding of collapse—is relatively new to anarchism, yet the reality of the situation is getting harder to ignore. Many anarchists continue to turn a blind eye towards the consequences of domestication, which remains the centerpiece of anarcho-primitivist critique. It continues to haunt the Left and demand recognition.

In this decade, we've seen the fragility of civilization come to the forefront not only in radical circles, but in the mainstream as well. Like any pertinent subject, the spectacle of over-saturating impulses has sidelined serious discussions that should be taking place, but the terms are there, the fears are there, the feelings are there. No matter how much we bury it, no matter how much we deny it, there is no mistaking the failures of civilization that surround and comprise our lives.

The economic collapse, the ecological instability, the unending resource wars, the overarching fear of others, the all encompassing depression which is the handmaiden of modernity, and the complete inability of civilization to downgrade are the unmistakable earmarks of a society cannibalizing itself. And this is where we are, the end products of a failed experiment that has lasted far too long. The slumbering wildness beneath a facade of tamed animality awakening as the veneer crumbles and the primal anarchy of our human nature awaits.

The unifying theme of these essays is an attempt to understand how nature, both wildness and our own human nature, has refused domestication; how the hollowed corpse of civilization barrels forth without subsistence and without aim. While I certainly emphasize failure, as the section headers indicate, I want to make it clear that the failure of domestication is ultimately paying homage to wildness, to the ability of animals and this earth to outlive and to stand in defiance of the insanity that civilization has wrought upon the earth. I believe that despite everything we've thrown at it, the primal anarchy of our human nature prevails.

That is the central message.

There's quite a bit here on the subject of revolution. As someone involved in the anarchist milieu for the better part of two decades, it's something I see as the unquestioned core of radicalism. It's something that I've struggled with and that's part of the point in leaving earlier essays reflecting that struggle in.

Here, more than anywhere, lie some seeming inconsistencies that have everything to do with trying to let go of that last piece of Leftism. 'Revolution and/or Insurrection' is a case in point. When I wrote that, I was asking questions about revolution, yet came to the conclusion that the concept may be salvageable, albeit reluctantly. Immediately after that essay was published I came to the opposite conclusion, though for the same reasons I laid out in the essay.

The Left in many ways embodies the progressivism inherent in the myths of civilization. The idea that this death march can be reformed, repaired, overhauled, adapted or evolved to fit in a world of limited resources and functional ecosystems is a failed nightmare. The idea that technology, bureaucracy or any mixture of the two can or should improve upon the millions of years our ancestors have lived within the cycles of our planet has led to a blind drive into an untold future on a path paved with dire ecological, social and psychological consequence. The last thing we need at this point are more delusions.

And the idea that we could undo all this through the very system that perpetuates it is a benign disregard for the power political systems hold. That power is something we have never been prepared to comprehend anymore than humanity has been able to harness it. The dream of revolution, of overthrowing the system that we've helped perpetuate is rooted in the grand delusion that

within this society we have the control. The lessons of this Earth are to the contrary, and as the death rattle of civilization roars louder we will learn that giving up control is the path back to wildness.

We have more to gain from pulling the plug than harnessing it.

These essays were originally published in a number of journals and zines, primarily *Species Traitor*, *Green Anarchy*, *Green Anarchist*, *Black Clad Messenger*, *Disorderly Conduct*, and a number of other places. I'd like to thank everyone who has contributed to the editing and publishing, especially to the untold folks responsible for translating and publishing in a vast number of languages.

I'd like to specifically thank John Zerzan for his support, friendship and encouragement throughout the years, Andy Hurley and the FC folks for making this possible, to all my friends for pushing me and putting anarchy into action by heckling me until I finish projects. And to all the folks I've somewhat notoriously argued with over the years for inadvertently making me tighten up my arguments.

Above all else this goes out to the Earth, its wild inhabitants past, present and future, and all those struggling. We will outlive this.

And finally to Yank who never ceases to remind me what is really important to life and why we struggle at all.

2010



# The Failure of Domestication





# Unintended Consequences

For millions of years, humans have lived as anarchists. That is, as autonomous individuals without the existence of coercive power, work, and institutions: without mediation. The “state of nature” may more appropriately be called the natural anti-state. It was never paradise (the walled gardens) or utopia (the perfect place of the imagination), it just was. But it’s not simply a historical thing either. The linear thought of reason would have us believe so, being led by the prophets of production (Moses, Smith, Marx, etc). Anarchy is in our bones. It’s the way we act; it’s the way that millions of years of evolution have shaped us. As Paul Shepard puts it we are beings of the Paleolithic: hunter-gatherers, primal beings of this earth.

But something happened. This is no great mystery and no matter how devoted we are to the gods of progress and production, we all know things aren’t going too great. We’ve been led astray. To try and confront what that means, we must first understand what we are. The life of nomadic hunter-gatherers is intrinsically different from the spiritually dead world of modernity: the current face of global, technological civilization. Hunter-gatherers themselves are no different, though. No one is born “primitive” or born “civilized.” We people born in a different time and place, including the large portion of us who had the misfortune of being born in the latter category.

Nomadic hunter-gatherer societies typify egalitarianism. They are, as they must be by their nature, flexible and organic. Being nomadic means being adaptive: that is the key to anarchy. When there are droughts, societies can move to more hospitable regions. Boundaries, where they exist at all, are defined by the

center rather than arbitrary lines or markers. Who is at one site at any particular time is fluid and there are no strangers. Egos are intentionally deflated so that no skill becomes more valued than others. Population is kept in check by the nature of mobility and what Richard B. Lee has called the “contraceptive on the hip,” the reality that when mothers nurse children exclusively birth spacing is naturally widened.

But most importantly, everyone is capable of fully sustaining themselves. So when people do group together, they are doing so on their own terms. If people get angry or frustrated with others, they are free to leave and the impact of being shunned is felt harshly. There are no real specialists and no possessions that cannot be made or exchanged easily.

*There is no mediation between life and means of living.*

The nomadic hunter-gatherers live in an entirely sacred world. Their spirituality reaches as far as all of their relations. They know the animals and plants that surround them and not only those of immediate importance. They can understand the languages of animals and ecosystems civilization considers speechless. They know how to see beyond themselves and are not limited to the human languages that we hold so dearly. Their existence is grounded in place, they wander freely, but they are always home, welcome and fearless.

It's easy to criticize any theory that looks for an “original sin” or points fingers towards any particular event. In many ways I agree, but I think the picture is really more complex. At no point was there a conscious decision to become civilized or a point when people stopped listening to the earth. Instead, there were certain things that have happened and they have had serious implications for the way we deal with each other and the earth around us.

I don't think that the first people to domesticate plants and animals knew that what they were doing would turn the world they loved into something to eventually fear. Or that the growing fear of wildness would eventually mean destroying everything outside the barriers of the gardens, just to ensure that the lurking wild would not creep in. It's really doubtful that the first people to settle in one area thought they were taking steps towards a life plagued by warfare. Or that having more children would mean a constant and increasing state of growth and expansion. It's doubtful that the first people to become largely dependent upon stored foods would

realize that this would mean the creation of coercive power and break the egalitarianism that autonomous people had.

Of course, none of us will ever know for sure what was being thought or why these things were being done. There's no shortage of theories about the origins of domestication, sedentism, or surplus-orientation, but for all practical purposes those theories are really irrelevant. Why steps were taken in the first place does not change the fact that those steps have carried a number of implications. When each of those steps was taken, something significant did happen and a trail of unintended consequences connects those events with where we are now.

But this is not a sign that governments or power are merely some benign force. Politicians and profiteers know that they are destroying the planet and poisoning all life, they just see money and control as more important. Their choices are hardly unintentional compared to the person who unthinkingly plugs into an electrical outlet or fills their car up with gas. Power mongers will act in their own interest, but their power relies on our complacency with the terms that they have imposed on us.

This doesn't mean that every person involved is necessarily aware or that they should be damned, that doesn't get us very far. But what is obvious is that our situation is getting increasingly worse. With the growing dependency on fossil fuels, we are stealing from the future in a way never known before. We are standing in a rather familiar position: like the Cahokian, Chacoan, Mayan, Aztecan, Mesopotamian, and Roman civilizations before us, we aren't seeing the symptoms of collapse that define our times. We aren't thinking about anything but what is good for us here and now. We aren't thinking outside of our conditioning.

*We aren't thinking outside of civilization.*

But we don't even know it. We aren't even given the ability to read the times, because it is contrary to the rational path that reason has laid out before us.

But things have changed. Things are changing. Whether we recognize it or not: *something will happen*. We have the ability to look back and try and awaken the part of ourselves that has been buried by domestication: the civilizing process. We can see that there is something about the nomadic hunter-gatherer existence that just worked. We can see how our primal anarchy was broken down by sedentism, domestication, surplus, and how that breakdown would

solidify further with horticulture, the creation of states, agriculture, and even more so with industrialism and hyper-technological modernity.

Something about these steps took away our autonomy. They made us dependent. Supposedly we were freed from the barbarism of self-determination towards the new freedom of work and a world of stuff. We sold egalitarianism for plastic.

Our current situation is a grim one but we are not hopeless. We have before us the legacy of unintended consequences that slowly took us from egalitarianism to totalitarianism. The question we have to ask is: what have we lost? What part of our being has been sold off in the process? We can look beyond the myths of reason, of divine, linear time, and progress, and awaken ourselves in the process.

Civilization is a huge target. Overcoming domestication is a massive undertaking, but our souls and lives are at stake. The future and the past are closer than we think. The blood and spirit of anarchy flows through our veins. We don't need to just look before civilization; we need to listen to ourselves and the world around us. We have the benefit of seeing what steps have taken us down the wrong path, and with that, we can start taking steps back towards our primal anarchy.

And in this process, the process of *becoming human*, the abstractions between our fate and the fate of the world will wither. There will be no question of when it is the right time to strike against the concrete manifestations of civilization or to know where to strike.

When we learn to open ourselves to wildness and chaos, the organic anarchy of our beings will flow. Attacking civilization is no easy feat, but when we listen, when we embrace our anti-state of nature, we will know exactly what to do.

2004

# The Forest Beyond the Field: The Consequences of Domestication

*This essay was meant to be an overview of work that I had been doing at the same time on a couple books that were then well underway. As such, it's written in a polemic style, as opposed to being heavily cited or including quotations, all of that was in the main works, however, most of those were never published. At least much of that hadn't been published at the time. Virtually all of my work since elaborates on the framework presented here.*

Humans always have and always will be social animals. Where our food comes from and how we get it largely determines how we interact with each other.

If we are going to take ourselves seriously as anarchists, then we have to understand that anarchy is about far more than the type or presence of government. It is about social relationships. Simply not having government doesn't tell us a whole lot about a particular society. To understand what anarchy might mean, what it looks and feels like, we have to understand human society.

As animals, the way we interact with each other is rooted in the way that we live. When we are surrounded by wildness, we will act differently than when we are surrounded by machines and concrete. When we are surrounded by domestication we act, think, and feel differently. The isolated, sedated, tense, and overwhelming reality that we've created now is inseparable from the material world our

elders have built and that we maintain.

It gets harder and harder to imagine a world different from the one we were born and raised in.

It gets harder to imagine that the way people interact now is not how humans have always been.

So we give in. We accept this reality as our only reality. We accept that humans have a natural inclination to take action at the expense of each other and at the expense of the world at large. We try to make the best of our time and that is that. Some of us turn to religion, some turn to politics, some turn to sedatives (electronic or chemical); we turn anywhere where we can find some kind of break from the inhuman condition that drowns us.

Traditionally anarchists haven't been able to really get out of the reality that has surrounded them. Rural anarchists have tried to turn the feudal farm life into an anarchist dream world. Urban anarchists have tried to turn the curse of the factory into a blessing for humanity at large. Contemporary anarchists have tried to wrestle their new savior—technology—from the hands of capitalists. Downscale, decentralize, democratize, or whatever it is that these anarchists and other social reformists or civil revolutionaries are aiming at, never gives up that reality. It mistakes hope for real potential and despair as a limitation to how deep change could or must be.

But this reality is a created reality. It has a beginning and it has an end. From our vantage point, we are able to see both. To understand what options we have and depths of where we can go from here, we need to look outside our reality, outside of our society and our machines. From here, we can understand that our reality is not as mighty as we are led to believe and that the soul of the human is not the individualistic scourge waiting for the chance to take power. We can see that the world that we've cut, plotted, paved, tamed, wasted, and mined is neither dead nor is it laying passively for our use. We can see the wildness lurking both around and within us. And, through this, we can see the end of our own created reality and the community of wildness that awaits us.

This is the point of the anarcho-primitivist critique. It is not an ideology, party or basis for any platform. It is an understanding of the origins and implications of our reality. It is a window looking outside of the city, field, and garden to understand both what we have lost and how.

This essay is a contribution to that critique. It is meant to shatter the idea that there is a monolithic type of society like “hunter-gathers” or “horticulturalist” or “agriculturalist” because things are more complex in reality. And it is in this complexity that we can best see the origins of our own reality and better understand how we can break out of it.

But it is also important to remind ourselves that as a critique, it is only meant to inform our reality and our actions, not to define them. I am critical of domestication in any form and am working towards a life of semi-nomadic hunting and gathering myself, but this in no way limits my solidarity and sympathy for the many struggling horticultural or sedentary hunter-gatherer societies that have and will exist. My conclusions about the consequences of domestication are important for those overturning our own domestication and breaking from civilization. It is meant for those of us who are in need of someplace to go. My target is civilization: the culture of cities (with an emphasis on both the culture and the city). Digging to the very early signs of coercive power and the seeds of civilization among other societies is not meant to say that those seeds will always flourish, but it is meant as both a warning and a direction for us and for future generations.

And with this said, it's time to dig at the roots of our own reality.

### *Humanity in the Statelessness of Human Nature*

I believe in human nature.

It's not necessary that you do too, but there's a lot about human society and behavior that has to be answered to. Put in certain situations with respect to socialization, we tend to act in similar ways. Likewise, the ongoing domestication process has always worked in the same ways, manipulating and channeling human need into dependency. Our similar reactions are part of our heritage as social animals. And that is how millions of years of evolution and social living have made us.

There's an organic nature to evolutionary change. But evolutionary change is something that spreads out over thousands and millions of years. It is a response to long-term conditions with respect to short-term changes. We survive because, as a species, we are adaptive. But that has been a kind of mixed blessing. While it helps our body store fat and water so we can cover large distances

or that we are capable of taking in so many types of food, it has also made it possible for us to survive in cities and sustain ourselves off of overly processed waste. The things that we've been capable of surviving for short periods has been seen by some as an evolutionary change in and of itself. It has allowed some to think that humans were intended for city and industrial life or that this way of survival and cancerous growth can continue to exist. Either by the hand of god/s or the knowledge of science, we believe this way of living is natural.

Evolution has been condensed into a social reality. That is why we have racism, sexism, class, and caste-based societies, and their realities of slavery, war, colonization, imperialism, and the like. As we stepped into the tamed countryside, the ordered city, the industrial bubble, the global system, and the virtual reality, we've seen change in terms of generations rather than thousands of years. Those who shape and benefit from these realities can only do so with a willing army, producers, and reproducers. They take their short-term benefit as reality and turned history into evolution. They created gods and then became them.

Our knowledge, our reality, is what the domesticators have and continue to teach us about ourselves and about our world.

Evolution becomes the survival of the fittest because that is the only way to really make it in our reality. We are told that some are born to rule and some are born to serve. Or some are simply smarter and more driven than others.

The same goes for society. Some were meant to fail, some were meant to succeed. Some were meant to produce and some to consume. Those who raise the lobster for the rich to eat have to buy the rice that they are sold. Those whose children were sacrificed by Aztec kings bodies withered while they only had a diet of corn to eat. Those who cut the forests and carved the giant statutes on Easter Island could only have focused on what they were going to eat then and there, unable to see the collapse that was looming. That's the nature of the civilized game: someone or someplace will always have to sacrifice for the benefit of society.

These are the realities of the great myth of Progress: the purest form of social evolution. We look towards the heavens or towards our glorious future as we sacrifice our lives and our bodies for the society that ultimately consumes us. This applies as much to the early agricultural kingdoms as it does to our own society. We move

forward out of our supposedly “savage” state of nature or we don’t.

The philosophers tell us this is an intentional act, a choice for every human born to make: progress or regress. They tell us about the social contract where society was created and directed. They tell us about the evolution of savages to barbarians to primitive kingdoms and onto the State and, the high point of evolution, civilization. The movement was directed and intentional, the consequences were necessary, and the direction was final.

But there was never any social contract. Only recently were the directions of growth and social momentum capable of being directed in such a predetermined and controlled way. Never was the creation or change of society such an ordered and planned thing. Never did any part of humanity evolve into a different being or was there any massive change over from hunter-gatherers to horticulturalists. Some societies changed, some societies grew, some stayed in a particular form, but some others kept growing. To feed that growth, they developed more tools and technologies; all designed to kill more people and cut more forests and dig soil more quickly. There was no hand of God in this nor any act of evolution.

And never was there an origin of society as such. No matter what we are now or have been, we have been social animals, first and foremost. Even the most archaic form of human society flowed organically from the way our bodies and minds have evolved.

This is where our human nature stems from. It flows from our needs as social animals that must think, eat, drink and sleep, our need for companionship and community (both human and non-human), our need for autonomy and the fulfillment of simply being. For over 99.99% of human history, that has looked like small and open bands of about 15-25 people who live in temporary camps throughout a given bioregion with loosely defined and larger affiliations to each other. Food was hunted, gathered, scavenged, or fished. In some, people could make fire and others would keep coals. Cultural knowledge was shared and all had equal access to what domesticated peoples refer to as resources. Meals, hunts, and social life were collective and while men and women often did separate things, neither was seen as more valuable than the other.

This is the life of the nomadic hunter-gatherer. It is the way that we have lived for the bulk of our existence as humans and then it goes back even further. This is the world that has shaped our minds and bodies as humans.

And this is where we'll start our look at human societies.

*Nomadism and the Spirit of Primal Anarchy*

If you needed one word to sum up the nature of nomadic hunter-gatherer life, it would be that very thing that shaped our evolution: adaptivity.

Adaptivity means a number of things, but we'll keep our focus in the sense of ecological and social adaptivity. The life of a nomadic hunter-gatherer is rooted in their ecological world. It means reading the signs and movements of the animals around you. It means following the growth of plants and the lives of other beings as they follow cycles of growth and death.

The health of the bioregion at large is inseparable from the world around you. For us, this can be understood in a purely material or rational sense: you don't shit in your own bed. That much is true, but humans are spiritual beings. Our spirit has been channeled through the soulless anti-spirit of science, religion, and an uprooted reason. But among rooted peoples, that spirit is everything. That spirit is what connects an individual to the community and wildness around them.

There is no split between the self and the other. There is no way of taking yourself mentally or physically out of the bioregion where you live. It's as unthinkable as it would be unnecessary. The purpose and place of any individual is inseparable from their world. So what you end up with is a lived spirituality: one that is about individual connections and experience, that grows through self-discovery, that is celebrated through being lived rather than through highly elaborate rituals and ceremonies (though they often still occur for primarily social reasons), and is anarchistic in essence.

That spirit of anarchy is important for a number of reasons. But I mainly bring it up because it is something we've had taken from us and something that we tend to lack an understanding of or capacity for. Spirituality for us refers to something distant and based on belief rather than direct experience. It is dictated to us rather than coming from within. For us, spirituality equates to religion, which equates to something created and spread, most notably, by old men roaming in far away deserts thousands of years ago. That distance is reflected in our disconnection from our own spirits and the places where spirits grow.

That spirituality, that connectedness, is something that we need, and, as we shall see, it is through this need that the domesticators tap into our being and break us. But it is also the basis of social life. There are few mysteries to how life works for those who live within wildness. A nomadic hunter-gatherer will grow up learning about the plants, animals, and everything else that they directly interact with, but they are never isolated into a world with only themselves and their food. They are a part of that greater community, involved within it, and so they are constantly learning about the interconnections of things.

This contrasts pretty harshly against our own disconnected reality. For instance, a lot of civilized people despise insects, snakes, and rodents. We're not taught to see how all of these things interact. So we swat flies and mosquitoes away while we spray insecticides on their and our homes, we step on spiders and cockroaches, and have rats exterminated. While ignoring the health consequences of all these chemicals temporarily, we miss out on the obvious. Spiders very rarely bite in any serious way, but we're afraid of them (even though we're far more likely to die or have serious health effects from what we use to rid them), but then complain when the flies and mosquitoes are around us more after we kill the spiders that would otherwise eat them. Or we overlook how similar rats can be to us as they live off the waste of our own society. And we definitely overlook how most rats, mosquitoes, stinging bees, and the like were brought into these places through our progress and growth, not theirs.

But for those rooted in their bioregion, it is as impossible to see all of these things as disconnected even more than it is for us to see how they all fit together and need each other, even as we pull the rat from the domesticated cat's mouth. That spiritual connection and rooting is one of the most important aspects for remaining adaptive: you can see the immediate and delayed consequences of any action that you take.

And this is where nomadism is most important: if you are rooted in a bioregion, but not physically stuck in any one particular area, then you are capable of moving before any spot has been over-foraged, over-run or over-hunted. Nomadism is about adaptivity. Just as having a wide-ranging diet is important, so is having a wide-ranging area that you are familiar with. Life tends to be predictable, but things always come up. One year might be dry, another wet,

and some plants and animals might be having a harder year than normal while some might have small population bursts. These are the things that a nomadic life prepares you to deal with and help you to understand.

All of this applies equally to social life. When you move often, it only complicates the situation to have stockpiles. You own what you can carry, which is often nothing that couldn't be easily recreated by most members of society. There aren't options for trying to establish any individually owned territory. The only thing that comes close is a sense of belonging that, where it does exist, usually only applies to honey and some fruit trees. But even this is nothing like private property: it refers to a particular connection to a certain person or family rather than being a right of exclusion for others. Everyone has equal access to the same places and same things.

Food is shared on principle rather than any exception. That is a foundation for mutual aid: you share when you have food, I share when I have food, and no one goes hungry. With no stockpiles, granaries, or stashes, no one has anything to yield over others, at least nothing that they're just as capable of getting on their own. Everyone contributes in their own right.

This is the basis for an egalitarian society. No one in society is given more or less merit than others. Children are given the same respect and standing as others, though, like the elderly, they are not expected to make the same kind of contributions as their parents. Everyone brings something different to a society. Children have the freedom to go off with others in their age groups and create their own camps, mimicking the lives of their parents. This is how people learn to survive and how society maintains itself: by willing individuals who take their own steps rather than have them forced.

This is primal anarchy. This is the world that our minds and bodies have grown into.

And it is truly sustainable. The adaptivity of nomadism ends up being rather ingenious in a number of ways. Keeping on the move keeps populations down. You can only have as many children as you can carry and with a lack of processed and domesticated food sources, the primary food source for children up until the age of four is breast milk. Being rooted in a particular region, the parents will not bring a child into the world if they cannot support them or offer the same world their parents gave them.

Though this decision can end in infanticide (an act of

compassion as opposed to the cruelty of bringing a child into the world unwanted and unloved because of some distant morality rather than direct needs), rarely does it get this far. Producing breast milk slows ovulation. Living a nomadic and active life both slows the onset of menstruation for girls and further slows ovulation for women. There are plants that can be taken as preventatives or to induce an early miscarriage. None of this carries social taboo because everyone understands the basic needs of a child and knows that a child born without these is worse off than a child who dies at birth.

Our own morality causes us to see these things as cruel. But our lack of understanding comes from our own mediation from the world and from the needs of our own children. Even the moralistically driven Kropotkin noted the irony: “if these same Europeans were to tell a savage that people, extremely amiable, fond of their own children and so impressionable that they cry when they see a misfortune simulated on the stage, are living in Europe within a stone’s throw from dens in which children die from sheer want of food, the savage too, would not understand them.”<sup>1</sup>

This is just a sign of how far we’ve gone from where and how we have lived. And it’s one that clouds our ability to see what it is that we have lost. We look for an economic sphere, a religious sphere, a social and political sphere among these societies until we can find something and isolate it: we reflect our own divided world into these different surroundings and contexts and sure enough it can be as unappealing and contrived as our own society. But this dissection leaves nothing of the original society. There are no separate spheres or dirty laundry: things simply are as they are.

You can see this in everyday life. There are no gardens to tend, there is far less in the way of ritual and ceremony to prepare for, compared to village dwellers. There is no need for schedules, time, or calendars. You can remain adaptive. Women and men will wake up and join their friends to talk and share gossip. The men might spend the morning or the day gambling over arrows, determining which folks might be going hunting the next day. They play games and joke, just as the women do as they hang around camp or while out gathering. The smaller children might be with their parents, though most often their mothers until they are fully weaned. Once they are weaned they’ll play together on their own with other kids their age, spending their time playing games based around

cooperation rather than competition and they'll create their own mock societies and marriages, even including feuds. The older children will do much of the same, though starting to play around more with the idea of sex. Parents might discourage this kind of playing, but it's in word only: they did the same, just as their parents did. They know their children are off somewhere and likely having sex, but they'll do nothing about it. Kids will just be kids.

In the mock societies of the youths, young boys will hunt and young girls will gather. Though there is no pressure on youths to provide all their own food, it's all become a part of their play as it remains through the rest of their life. Men gamble so they aren't relied upon for hunting every time just as women aren't out gathering everyday or expected to serve their husbands who are as capable of foraging. There are few to no demands. There are always opportunities to mix things up a bit. Other people might stay with your band for months at a time, and anyone is able to go stay with another band when they want to. Large kills turn into gorging feasts with people from far and wide. When you have no means or need for storage, the only option is to eat it then and there, which can make for some large social reunions.

Warfare is unknown, largely because there is no (quasi)political means for organizing nor any solidified group identity along which to form sides. Tensions might arise, arguments and fights might happen, but violence is never as much of an issue as when those involved have always known each other and probably have some binding connection (even if it is relatively distant). Where there are no strangers, you lose the anonymity that frees you from the consequences of your actions. So when tensions rise and others can't cool them down, those involved can simply go with another band or a minor "nothing fight" just gets everything out. But the greatest soother is the ability to laugh at and with each other. In such a world, there's no reason to take things more seriously than they need to be taken. I know it's hard to imagine, but we weren't always the wound-up mess that we've become.

And this is where our bodies and minds are forged. This is a place where there is no authority or institutions. This is primal anarchy: a way of life that is lived rather than idealized and constructed. It is organic and flowing, and most importantly, adaptive.

This is what lurks within us.

### *Domestication*

No one gives up the primal anarchy of our spirit easily. But clearly something happened. Somewhere something came along and changed everything. The social contract theorists tell us we broke out of our “savagery” through a new collective consciousness, the social Darwinians and their followers tell us that we (or at least some of us) evolved, and some say we changed out of necessity.

Any way you put it, most tell us that what happened was a matter of inevitability. And no matter how many divisions there are about why things happened, there is no question about what that something was: domestication.

Domestication can mean a number of things. In terms of plants, it refers to intentional breeding for what we consider desired traits until the initial genetic structure of that plant has changed. The same applies among domesticated animals; their wild ancestors were brought into captivity and selectively bred. The real level of genetic change is questionable, but the underlying goal is this: what is bred is what the domesticators’ desire and that the plant or animal becomes dependent upon the domesticator to exist.

Domestication is, at its root, about the creation and maintenance of a synthetic order. It is about control. It reduces the fullness of the world into categories and systems of needs and resources. It turns wild communities into a sum of all parts rather than a single, interconnected community.

By most definitions, domestication is about breeding something “for human use.” That definition can be rather problematic. Humans too, we tend to forget, are wild animals. Like all other wild beings, use-value thinking is something foreign to our understanding and relationships with the world. A need to turn beings into something solely for human use is as unthinkable as it would be impractical. If the world were turned into something for our own use, what would happen to the rest of that world?

Unfortunately that question is being answered.

But this isn’t just for human use. It is for civilized human use, for use by domesticated humans.

In terms of humans, domestication is the civilizing process. It is about turning wild humans into something for civilization’s use. It turns individuals into farmers, peasants, workers, bosses, police, and soldiers just as it turns forests and wetlands into gardens and

gardens into fields surrounding cities and fields into deserts.

It is about taming humans for domestic life. That is, a life of villages and cities, a life of farms and pastures. These are places where we are separated physically and mentally from the bioregions we've grown in, where autonomy is gradually lost to the influence that became authority, where life is dictated rather than based on self discovery, where work is necessary, and where armies roam and police enforce.

Anarcho-primitivists, like most social theorists, have typically focused on agriculture as that source of change and the real origin of domestication. But that doesn't explain why people who had recently been hunter-gatherers built the walls of Jericho or how societies like those along the Salish Coast (northwestern United States into Canada) and some Maori of New Zealand had complex kingdoms complete with slaves while lacking agriculture. Looking at domestication as a social phenomena as well as referring to plants does help to explain this while offering a glimpse of what would (in some cases) become the cornerstone of civilization.

### *Sled Dogs, Tame Horses, Fish Runs, and Wild Grains*

Domestication runs counter to the adaptivity that has helped and shaped us for millions of years. Sure enough it has allowed us to expand the size of our society, but never without consequence. It has given us some conveniences where we might not have had them, but, again, not without consequence.

Everything we do has consequences. Some of them are more immediate and more widely impacting than others, but they are consequences all the same. At no point was there a step into domestication that jumped right into cities and civilization nor was there a leap between the small-scale bands of nomadic hunter-gatherers into massive scale kingdoms. Change comes with time. Only recently, with the helping hand of the machine, was that change happening in terms of years rather than millennia. And you can see the bounty of such change as most past civilizations have lasted one to two thousand years whereas the American empire has been collapsing after only two centuries.

Domestication, like all change, is a gradual process. The first appearance of domestication in any society is going to be far less noticeable than any of the spectacular events that we are sold

through ideas of history. Reality is never that fantastic or cut and dry. But domestication has crept into some hunter-gatherer societies, and through these, we can get a clearer picture of its impacts.

When talking about hunter-gatherer societies with domestication, we're most often referring to sedentary hunter-gatherers. These societies settled around fields of wild grains or along rivers with seasonal fish runs that can be caught and stored. But the best place to start is to talk about the nomadic hunter-gatherers with domesticated or captive animals.

The two types of societies we're referring to here are the sled-drawn Arctic hunters and the mounted hunters of the plains (throughout North and South America) and the Subarctic. We'll look first at the sled-drawn Arctic hunters.

The northern Arctic and Subarctic regions are huge places. Most peoples living farther north are typically considered Inuit or Inuit-related, but the diversity between nearly neighboring groups can be as varying as groups on different parts of the world. But one thing that is held in common is the widespread presence of sled dogs. Domesticated dogs are a fairly common occurrence. You'll find them among hunter-gatherers just as you'll find them in horticultural societies or our own. These dogs often came into our world through a slow process of self-domestication: they liked our sloppiness and we make good companions. Eventually humans would get a hand in their breeding and lead to the breeds we are familiar with now.

The sled-pulling dogs are clearly somewhat closer to their wild ancestors than many other dogs we see elsewhere throughout the world. But this isn't to give the impression that they are more recently or less intensively domesticated. Getting dogs to pull sleds is no easy task. It takes an intensive form of domestication that turns them against each other and (ab)uses their pack instincts. They are separated at an early age, have their teeth filed, and are kept hungry, at times nearly starving to keep them focused on the hand that feeds. This is domestication in the truest social sense.

The dogs offer nothing in and of themselves aside from their labor. What keeps nomadic societies from accumulating possessions and surplus is their inability to carry it. So the dogs do it. Being able to carry large quantities of meat, fat, and hides leads to a social situation not too different from the more egalitarian villages and the dogs make it possible to remain a nomadic society

rather than a typically settled one. The dogs make some degree of surplus possible where it otherwise could not be.

And you get glimpses of the social relationships that come along with surplus, though not in the extreme form that you'll find in sedentary societies. Surplus is really a form of property: it is a possession that, while often communally held, must be put under some kind of control for redistribution. That informal control nearly always finds its way into the hands of men—those who hunt the meat. So while the Arctic hunter-gatherers still have relatively egalitarian societies, you get an increasing emphasis on social compliance and structure. You get minor forms of dependency.

But the animals don't always have to be domesticated. The Caribou Inuit, for example, seasonally round up herds of wild caribou and become mounted hunters. So while this is only seasonal, you get a micro-scale version of these kinds of relationships.

Mounted hunter-gatherers, like those of the Great Plains, are another type altogether. Throughout the Americas, these societies were largely horticulturalists or roaming hunter-gatherers before the horse was brought over by Europeans (or returned as some of these societies say). The horse changed their means of subsistence, but it didn't intrinsically change the ways of a once sedentary society. Even more so, it became possible to focus more on raiding and warring with surrounding and even distant societies. So rather than being a return to hunter-gatherer life, they became, to some degree, extensions of settled life. That's not to say that nomadism didn't revive older, more egalitarian, ways, but it's not to say that it was a complete throwback either.

The increased reliance on warfare and raiding tended to emphasize the warrior spirit that carries the seed of patriarchy. With warrior societies, you get an increased interest in secret societies and men's houses at the cost of the more value-free egalitarianism of most nomadic hunter-gatherer societies. You get an increased emphasis on violence in childhood and its ritualization into social life. We'll see this developed more when we're talking about horticulturalists. But needless to say, surplus produces a kind of property that humans had never known before. This is the birth of political life.

You see this even more where hunter-gatherer societies have settled around huge, seasonal runs of fish that can be caught, dried, and stored. Or where there are huge fields of storable wild grains.

The latter is what laid the roots for our now global civilization. Hunter-gatherers settled aside the floodplains of Mesopotamia where seasonal flooding kept the soil rich and gave rise to fields of wild grains. Though technically not domesticating plants or animals until later, they turned into harvester of these fields, or farmers without farming. Their social life was really no different than farmers. And it should come as no surprise when this was the first society to begin building huge defensive walls around its city.

There's little way of telling why these societies chose to settle, if indeed it ever was a choice: something I find highly unlikely. There are always theories, but considering when this happened, we'll never really know for sure.

But we do know the consequences.

It starts out on a minor scale: they come seasonally to the flood plains or runs to gather and fish respectively. They eat a lot and take some with them as they move. Not much changes at this point, especially without domesticated animals to carry their surplus for them. Slowly, seasonal stops turn into seasonal camps and seasonal camps turn into seasonal villages. Place becomes increasingly more permanent and sedentism creeps in.

The problem with sedentism is that it goes against our adaptivity. People become attached to a place rather than a bioregion. They accumulate more possessions and you start to get an increasing sense of group identity as population grows and that individual flexibility starts to hinder the new social life that is emerging. The informal but influential roles of surplus 'manager' that we see among the mounted and dog-sled hunters turns into an increasingly important position as huge granaries and storehouses emerge.

Informal power, with the help of arising religious institutions and shaman-priests, turns to formal power, complete with its institutions, hierarchy, and force. Storage gave birth to coercive power, ultimately in the form of the State and civilization.

The increasing reliance upon the stored foods shaped a kind of political society unseen among any other hunter-gatherers and even most horticulturalists. You get complex chiefdoms and kingdoms. Though the village life of fishers typically has higher populations, those surrounding wild grains would build cities. When domestication did happen, it was less of an event than it was a need to feed a growing population. When you eliminate nomadism,

you eliminate natural checks on population and the ability to see the effects of your way of living. Thus begins the perpetual cycle of growth and expansion that leads to warfare, raiding, colonization, imperialism, genocide, and omnicide.

This is the birth of civilization.

### *From Gardens to Fields*

Looking at settled gatherers around fields of wild grains and runs of fish is taking a bit of a leap. This obviously has happened and is the heritage of our own civilization, but is a relatively rare occurrence.

The origins of domestication through many parts of the world looked far different. As I said earlier, there was nothing natural about the origin of domestication and certainly nothing evolutionary about it. It's simply something that happened. Sedentism, by its nature, makes it possible for populations to grow, and relatively quickly. But it didn't just expand unchecked everywhere. Far more societies have lived as horticulturalists and in a relatively stable manner for thousands of years.

A horticultural society is really a gardener society as opposed to field farmers. Like a garden, it is smaller scale and heavily diversified. You hear about Native American and Asian gardeners having hundreds of variations of a couple species of plant or grain: that's gardening. Plants are domesticated over a long period, starting with the selection of larger or tastier parent plants from the wild and then selectively breeding them for desired qualities. This can be risky business, so it's best to diversify. So you get hundreds of domesticated species and thousands of (typically regional) variations. This is a human controlled attempt at adaptivity: we can never replicate evolution, but we have certainly tried. And this diversity is an understanding that our efforts will likely fail, at least at some point.

There are a couple types of horticultural societies, but the two polar ends are those who focus on plants and animals higher in protein and those that are lower. And you'll get a mix of the two. But this matters because those who get less protein from their gardens and domesticated animals are going to stay more rooted in a semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer lifeway, whereas those with higher protein will turn more towards a huge growth in village life and are more prone towards an eventual growth into cities if they don't

collapse first.

Those who are still rooted in their hunter-gatherer lifeway are those who were spread throughout the Americas and parts of Eurasia. There are more sprinkled throughout the world, but certain regions having plants and animals that are more easily domesticated and that affects how a society develops. For a mixture of the two types, you'll get horticultural societies like those throughout the South Pacific Islands (New Guinea, Hawai'i, Trobriand Islands, etc) and some parts of Africa where tubers like sweet potatoes, taro, tapioca, and the like are a major part of the diet and you'll often find domesticated animals like pigs playing a huge role. And for societies which focus on protein or even less nutritious, but highly abundant, crops like corn, you have some mixed in the Americas (Pueblo, Cherokee, Aztecs, etc) and then plenty in Africa and throughout Asia where domesticated animals like goats and cattle play an important role.

There are also pastoral societies who are semi-nomads who focus almost exclusively on their domesticated animals like cattle and goats. These societies are most often outgrowths of horticultural and agricultural societies as they make a living through trade of animal byproducts for crops. They also tend to act as trader-merchants as they travel vast areas while grazing their animals and coming into contact with a number of other societies. Some of these societies (especially in central to southern Africa, like the Nuer and the Pokot) practice horticulture themselves as well, leaving them with highly developed village and political lives carried by parts of the population on their seasonal grazing (this kind of nomadism is called transhumance).

We'll turn our attention first to the semi-nomadic horticulturalists.

### *The Social Life of Gardeners*

Life among these horticultural societies can in many ways resemble that of nomadic hunter-gatherers. Things are relatively easy going. There are no schedules and few demands aside from those associated with clearing and working gardens. But even this is hard to consider work. Though gardens are intensive and often invasive, they tend to mock the layers of growth of the forest. They're a far shot from the clean and cleared gardens we are used to. Most often,

an outsider barely even recognizes that they are standing in the center of one.

This type of horticulture is called swidden gardening or slash-and-burn agriculture. Patches of the forest are burned and cut to make way for gardens. Some societies prefer older growth, while some will return to gardens left fallow for at least 25 years. The gardens merge with the forest as they are slowly moved in one direction every two years or so, keeping a good cycle of fallow to active garden land. Gardens are kept in an area only so long as the soil is as healthy as it was in the beginning, then they move on.

The gardens are usually within a couple hours walk of the village, though sometimes wind up a bit further. But the closer is the more ideal situation. Villages typically last about 25 years. When there is no room close left to garden, then the whole village will move closer to an area where gardens are needed. But more often than not, fallow gardens and village sites will be used again later in time.

Village types can vary from informal and campy to semi-permanent and large structures. The Yanomami live in a shabono: a large, primarily open roofed oval structure that the whole band occupies. The Tapirape, like some of the societies in the northeastern United States, lived in multi-family long houses in an oval shape with the men's house in the center. The Jivaro have open walled structures in an oval surrounding the men's house. You'll have a large variation in structures, but the overall pattern is the same: an oval shape with the men's house in the center.

Whatever types of structures any given society has, the daily life is typically the same: families tend to sleep around their own fire pit—though sometimes men, adolescent boys and, occasionally, menstruating women will share their own dwelling instead of with their family—within the larger structure. In all the South American societies mentioned here, everyone sleeps in hammocks that are strung up in the structures. Throughout the day, you'll often find them there relaxing, joking, telling stories and spreading gossip, perhaps weaving cordage, baskets, or nets, or fashioning some other type of hunting tool. Like the carefree nomadic hunter-gatherers, they laugh, sing, sleep, eat, and are overall just very laid back and relaxed.

The talking and visiting will often go on late into the night while others sleep through the noise, awaking long enough to bring the

fire back to life and maybe eat at some leftovers from the days' food. They'll wake up early, bathe, and meet back up. Men might clear a garden or go hunting while women might work in the garden or process foods at home. Most of this is all done by early afternoon when the lounging starts back up again.

Over time, the settled life tends to have a build up in tension or just gets overrun by heaps of scraps from food or whatever projects individuals have been working on. For some, the response is to trek: to go out and live in the forest for a couple months as hunter-gatherers again (though typically with a fair share of manioc flour). The change is always welcomed and leaves behind the tensions of village life.

But ecologically speaking this is extremely important as well. While the people are trekking, the forest re-enters the village. New life spreads in the decay of the leftover waste. The social and ecological build up of village life is cleared and ready for things to start over again. The trek ties them back to that greater ecological awareness of a rooted society, reaffirming what is always kept in mind through hunting, gathering, and roaming.

For the most part there is a generalized ease to these societies and they are still tied to that primal anarchy. But things are different. And in these subtleties we can see the consequences of domestication most clearly.

### *Wars and Witches*

The semi-sedentary societies that we've been looking at are no doubt anarchistic in both their lack of politics and in their relative egalitarianism. But I want to emphasize that this is relative to the kind of egalitarianism of the nomadic hunter-gatherers that we looked at earlier.

All settled societies challenge carrying capacity to some degree. Those who domesticate plants or animals are going to increase that challenge. How a society deals with this ultimately determines how sustainable it is. Horticultural societies rarely expand on such a scale that they face collapse, at least in the way that civilized societies do. That they remain small-scale and that gathering and hunting still play a large part in their society are ways to keep that higher level of autonomy.

However, maintaining that relative egalitarianism does have its

costs, in both social and political terms.

There are certain social customs that societies develop to keep inequality from emerging. The personal belongings of the dead are either buried with them or burned after their death as a limit to the amount of wealth. Most positions that are particularly influential are kept temporary and often as short-lived as possible. But maintaining that small-scale society without strangers is likely the most important aspect and that takes more invasive efforts.

The settled life—with increased access to storable food or foods that can be used to wean children earlier and places where mothers can easily raise multiple children without much concern for birth spacing—leads inevitably to population growth. Nearly all horticultural societies have these conditions, but most have a very minimal level of population growth. That translates socially to an increased number of taboos surrounding sex, large increases in infanticide, and, most importantly, warfare.

It must be stated clearly that warfare and violence are not the same thing. All humans are prone to violence, though some conditions—like overcrowding, for example—bring out the worst in us. That doesn't mean we are innately evil or bullies; it just is what it is. What separates warfare from violence is that it is one group attacking another and it is planned. When a fight breaks out, it's usually spontaneous. Most people might approach each other angry, but there's usually not a whole lot of forethought in the whole ordeal. Either way, it's typically individuals who've got no other way or interest in avoiding a circumstance that involves the two of them fighting directly. You see this more among hunter-gatherers who only take matters into their own hands, though it can't be overstated that most hunter-gatherer societies put far more weight on non-violent forms of conflict resolution.

Warfare is made possible by the settling of societies, made possible as relationships solidify around semi-permanent structures. Unlike the unrestricted bands among nomadic hunter-gatherers, group identity begins to emerge. As society breaks away from wildness through what it eats, it develops that same distance between itself and the other. It's easy for outsiders to become enemies, especially when things start to get tougher in your own life. But warfare is a bit more complicated: it doesn't just happen and there are specific reasons. Among horticulturalists, warfare is almost always retaliation against other bands or tribes for a

wrongful death or serious illness, most often at the metaphysical hands of another.

Now you have sorcerers and you have witches. A sorcerer is like a witch but attacks another village. A witch is in a village and often is not even conscious of the witching substance within them. Both of them cast spells upon others that they have serious problems with. Either position can be held by anyone regardless of gender.

However people think of these ideas, you can't say that this is just pointless superstition. Certainly the people truly believe it, but what reason do they have for not believing it? The accused witch can either be killed or must compensate individuals; an accused sorcerer will be killed in a raid where others might be killed as well. Nearly all deaths are retaliated, so the cycle continues.

This whole mess serves a number of functions; most notably it serves as a check on population. Warfare results in death, which results in fewer people. But in social terms, an increased interest in warfare also means an increased need for warriors. And for the first time, you start to get a preference for having boys instead of girls and for that group of boys to become fighters. With that preference established, there is a higher rate of female infanticide leading ultimately to fewer women. Fewer women means fewer children.

This is how a society will check itself from growing. In doing so, it isn't as much of a threat to the carrying capacity of its home and ultimately to itself.

There is a lot more meaning to having witches as well. Ecologically speaking, the witch is a reason for staying sanitary: you can have a spell cast upon you or something that was a part of you, like feces or hair. People go off into the forest to do their business and bury it. As villages can last up to 25 years, you would end up with enormous heaps of waste and a rather unpleasant situation in terms of comfort and health. A witch is a solidified mixture of all the negative feelings, anger, frustration, jealousy, and irritation between people. The witch is unrestrained and anti-social. It is everything that the villager shouldn't be. Yet what the witch represents is something that everyone has felt at some point. Settling down makes us semi-permanent neighbors and throws out our ability to just leave our arguments behind and go somewhere else. Tension runs high. The threat of witch accusations is one way to keep people from letting those tensions out and to keep the peace. No one wants to be accused of witchcraft.

This is proto-morality in a place where the group becomes more of a solid entity than a band, being comprised of whoever is around at the time. There is an increasing need for some kind of social institution where people turn to rather than to take care of their own matters. Socially speaking, there emerges the idea that “thou shall not kill” unless it is under socially acceptable circumstances: warfare, duels, or executions, which are based on group decisions.

But there is an underlying point here: social tensions run high when a society is under stress for whatever reason—too many people, not enough food, water, or not enough places for hunting and gardening. Stress here translates to ecological stress of some sort. A witch is an indicator for something larger that is going on and warfare is the reaction. This type of retribution-raiding-warfare cycle applies to Indigenous societies throughout the Americas and largely where smaller scale horticulturalist societies exist, but in places like the South Pacific Islands where pigs or other domesticated animals play an important role, you get this kind of warfare and in a far more ritualized form, surrounding the growth of a plant or arguments over village boundaries. Crowding is a bigger issue and so is the question of land availability: warfare ends up taking the shape of larger raids with a much higher death toll (wiping out all the men or an entire society is rare, but is not unheard of) or can be taken to a battlefield.

### *The Origins of Politics and the Roots of Patriarchy*

Where morality begins to emerge, so does politics. As group size increases from the 25 or so of a nomadic band to the 100-150 or so of a village, it gets harder for every decision to be based on consensus. That is unless you have some kind of manipulation. Here you get Big Men. This is the common name as the position is almost always held by a man, though it can be held by women in some societies. Big Men are powerless when it comes to coercion, but they are upheld for their ability to influence people. The position is by no means permanent, and there can be more than one Big Man in a society.

Most small-scale horticultural societies tend to be matrilineal. That means that group membership and property runs through the women's side of the family, not the men's. Gardens belong to a woman and are cleared by the men in her family and her husband.

Yet what comes out of the garden often belongs to the man. There are no workers here and all are roughly in the same social position. But a Big Man will often take multiple wives and thus have more gardens and a larger network of kin groups. Having access to more gardens, they tend to have a larger stockpile of food, which they might offer to those in need or hold large feasts with. The favors are exchanged as goods and are traded for support and social standing. The Big Man earns trust through giving and gains respect through their ability to speak and mediate arguments. They never possess coercive power, but influence can be powerful. Yet the autonomy of the individuals and of society as a whole can be seen in the relative powerlessness of the position: a Big Man lasts only so long as their input seems worth listening to and never is there a need to immediately fill the position if it's empty.

Though powerless, the position is still in the political realm: it is about influencing personal decisions into the flow of group consensus towards the will of an individual or small group. Like I said earlier, that individual is almost always a man. Take this, the higher value placed on warriors, and an emerging religious order that is preached more than rooted in self exploration and experience which is also passed down by men, and what starts to emerge are the roots of patriarchy.

No doubt about it, the men in horticultural societies have the upper hand. Or at least, they like to think so. But that thought translates to practice. Village structures and thinking are built around the idea that men have some hold over women and society. Most villages have a separate men's house in the center of the village. The men's house is the center for men's secret societies and a place where boys become initiated into manhood and are passed on the religious and quasi-political hold of the elder males. The house tends to be walled so that women can't see what is going on inside of it, at least in theory, but the men can see what is going on outside and in the other structures.

The position that the men grant themselves is rooted religiously as their creation myths emphasize how men came to power (even occasionally with stories about how it had to be stolen from the women). And that is something they often protect through threats of violence upon prying or socially deviating women.

By all means, this looks like patriarchy. But in practice, things are a bit different. You have the basic elements of patriarchy on the

men's side, but the difference lies with the women: they refuse to fall victim to the self-granted power of the males. They know their role in society and they know that they too have their grasp over the actions of men. Unlike most patriarchal societies, the women are not isolated in their own homes or gardens, but themselves hold strong alliances between each other. They stick together and are not afraid to take the offense against their husbands or other men.

The men have no monopoly on violence. Though they might wield it more often and can't always be defended against, the mystical rooting of their power is no real mystery to the women. That's not to say that they don't have interest or don't believe in or pass on their cultural knowledge (in fact, it is largely the mother that encourages aggression among boys), they just aren't starry eyed over or frightened by their husbands' ritualized displays of power.

This is clearly where patriarchy is rooted, but its true origins lie with the pacification and isolation of individual women. The strength of women as a whole lies in their deep-seated connections to each other. I mentioned earlier that most small-scale horticultural societies are matrilineal, but most are also matrifocal. That means that not only are group identity and property passed through women, but that men come into the women's society, not the other way around. Nearly all nomadic hunter-gatherers are ambilineal, who, like us, recognize paternal lineages on both their mother and their fathers side and have no set preference of moving with the husband or wives band, since they'll likely spend time with both and others. The women in matrifocal societies have known each other all their lives and it is the men that have to earn their respect. All connections are through the women, and these are the relationships that tie men together. So if a husband does wrong to his wife, it is her family that he has to answer to.

But when society grows, so does the need for a larger structure. The control of that structure has been almost exclusively in the hands of men. Egalitarianism is lost to the bureaucrats and their hierarchies. The mutual aid that once held society together becomes mutual dependency that eliminates difference. And this is the world of the farmers.

### *The Social Life of Farmers*

Anarchists since Kropotkin have held a deep longing for what they

see as a life of simplicity, yet still holding onto the “benefits” of civilization. Kropotkin, the Russian Prince, yearned for something simpler and more humane than his aristocratic life. In his attempt to reject his royal upbringing, he romanticized what he saw as the opposite: the rural peasant communal life.

Among the recently industrializing world, the yearning for a past golden age never went too deep. For the dreamers and revolutionaries, most could hardly see beyond the factories while others saw rows of crops as their savior, their liberators from the oppression of authority. Unfortunately, both of these ideals still hold today though we have access to a much deeper sense of human history. The golden age of the farm simply did not happen. Most of it is inseparable from aristocracies and earlier kingdoms. And that applies equally to Indigenous kingdoms and proto-states.

Farms and gardens are far from being one and the same. The gardens of horticulturalists are seated in and with the forest while the fields of farmers are the antithesis of the forest or the prairie: they are planned and meticulously controlled environments. Their social life is hardly different. All the things that we see emerge in small-scale horticultural societies become daily reality: political and religious control, hierarchy, bureaucracy, warfare, and patriarchy. And there are more: you get the origins of work, the economy, social debt, a drive towards sameness, specialization, and a highly organized division of labor. Most importantly, growing villages turn into emerging cities and the full-time military is turned inwards with police. We should never forget that the walls of Jericho and of all empires since were to keep civilians in as much as to keep outsiders out.

These societies must have this kind of force and the reason is simple: the life of the worker and the peasant is hard. Villages grow larger and the heavy work falls onto a separate class of peasants. Among Indigenous kingdoms, the elites are typically a small group of people who also control distribution. The majority of the society holds their position as farmers; most who serve in the armies are not exempted from this drudgery. And this has its costs as well: the larger a society becomes, the more specialized its crops, which means less options for food. Health takes a dive as larger more permanent villages with domesticated animals and issues of sanitation breed diseases.

Work in the gardens or with domesticated animals becomes the

work of both men and women. The overall roles offered to women become more focused on reproduction. Their lives becomes more devoted to the reproduction of society: literally through making and processing foods. Mostly, the values put on motherhood in smaller scale societies become deified in cosmology: upholding the role of women as producers of children over anything else. More children become necessary as field hands and future soldiers. It may happen slowly, but everything changes in agrarian societies. Even exchange is taken to a new level as the many specialists create markets to peddle their goods.

These societies can start out small like the Cahokians, Mayans, or Anasazians who settled as hunter-gatherers and incorporated gardens into their lives, quickly turning to agriculture. Their growing populations were not checked in the ways that the small-scale horticulturalists worldwide had done successfully. Among the Classic Maya, they were able to support large religious centers and cities off of large gardens before they made the quick change to agricultural fields with drainages only to collapse 200 years later.

Agricultural societies are far more ecologically and socially exhausting than horticultural ones. As society grows and becomes more politically complex, so does the need for workers and soldiers to get their jobs done right and efficiently. There is a drive towards sameness that comes through a more solidified religion with angry and vengeful gods, codifying the ability of the political leaders to coerce workers and peasants into doing their work at the risk of death or enslavement.

You can see this among the early cities of our civilization's own past, or you can see this among the Indigenous civilizations and empires that have and do exist. These societies are defined by their political and religious order. Among the many African empires, like the Zulu or the Bantu, there are established and powerful kings. The role of the king is a step above the chief. Though some small-scale horticultural societies do have chiefs, they tend to be closer to Big Men and the position hardly more solidified. But there are exceptions, among the Trobriand Islanders and among the Maori, chiefs are upheld like kings: commoners must stand lower than them, often cannot make eye contact, and among the Maori, they are often held to be so powerful in a religious sense that they become taboo themselves and have to be fed with tools to avoid impurity.

These chiefs, like kings, inherit their status, but earn their

positions through the image of power that they uphold. But they never have as much power as they do in times of war. And here is where we have the birth of the State.

### *Eternal War and the Birth of the State*

In nearly all horticultural societies, the only time that a chief holds any discernable power is during warfare. Chiefs and kings in these kinds of societies inherit their status but must earn their position. Unlike the Big Men, they must be more than just influential: they must be prominent and skilled warriors. The old Western ideal of the esteemed hunter or warrior taking the lead roles in society doesn't emerge until here. In less stratified societies, that kind of status was made impossible through ridicule because they know everyone has their abilities and their streaks of bad luck.

What starts out as a circumstantial position and power can only lead to more. As soon as the battle or raid is over, the war chief has lost all of his (this is a role almost exclusively held by men) control. The only way that they can expand that control is by increasing warfare. It's no mystery that positions of power only come with a more stratified society. Agricultural societies eliminate the taboo and customs that keep populations in check because they need more people. They need more bodies as part of the emerging Megamachine, more that can be lost on the frontier of an expanding empire, or can colonize the smaller scale bands of hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists that surround their territory.

When those checks are lifted, massive population explosions are a matter of inevitability. The domestication of plants and animals brought a 975 percent increase in human population bringing a total global population of 8 million by 8000 BC, barreling on to a billion by 1800 AD and now over 6 billion. More people means more food, which means more land, which means warfare and expansion. As the population grows, so does the presence of war. It doesn't necessarily take the emerging power of the king to continue to wage war: war becomes an increasingly felt necessity. That applies to our civilization as much as it has to the empires of the Zulu, Bantu, Maya, Aztec, Cahokia, Hopewell, Anasazi, Chaco, Mesopotamia, and so on.

The State, with its permanent and imposed order of coercive power, is born through eternal war. That's not just war against

outsiders, but a war against looming wildness, war against treason and disloyalty, a war waged as much on civilians as the would-be conquerors, or even those living more egalitarian and autonomous lives on the outside that threaten the continued availability of a willing work force merely by their existence.

The spirituality that once tied us to the world at large is turned against us as the wholeness of the world turns to the oneness of gods. No longer is our spiritual awareness a way of connecting with the life and wildness that flows between living beings, but it is turned upwards into the sky or deep into scattered places, but it is always external and always distant. We come to fear the created other as our idea of the self merges with our civilization. Just as horticulturalists begin to fear the world outside their gardens as they become increasingly dependent upon them and hunt predators as trophies to their own courage, we fear the wildness that we're born into. Our escape from such a "savage, primal state" becomes the earmark of our evolution. And our fears haunt us and allow the State to come in and manipulate them so that we will rightfully give up our autonomy for their protection.

There never has been a social contract; we never willingly and knowingly gave up our wildness for a civilized life: the domesticators have only tricked us from birth.

And this is where civilization emerges: from within the city and its countryside, from the order that is necessary to make both possible. The solidified control of the State is what civilization needed to become complete as we know it now. That is where all its roots come to fruition.

This is where we step into the world we know: the world of control and manipulation. The idea is put in place through cosmology and then actualized by emerging technology. Morality was the eyes and ears of the State before we created the technology to do the same. Steel tools were crafted to ease the chopping of forests and bodies. Guns, railroads, and ships simplified expansion and conquest. Having long ago buried our adaptivity, civilizations just keep on growing and expanding. They don't have the will or the way to stop.

There are no ways to downscale this beast or prolong it for long. Just as the Russian Revolution couldn't change the fact that a millennia of over-farming the same areas resulted in an insurmountable reduction in crops for the peasantry. They brought

in machines and chemicals, but those could only prolong for so long before they were forced to rejoin the global economy or die. But even this option is fading quickly as global collapse becomes our reality.

And that makes it even more important that we start paying attention to these things now.

### *The Future “Primitive” and a Question of Sustainability*

As we rapidly approach the inevitable collapse of our own civilization, the implications of this critique become all the more important. We need to ask what does it mean in terms of our own future and how does that influence our decisions and directions now.

I think the most important conclusion to draw from this is that domestication is not some monolithic and irreversible event in the past, but a constant reality that we recreate daily through our own lives. Realizing that we are agents of our own reality rather than passive actors or victims is the most important thing. For me, the logical conclusion is to act on this through rewilding and resisting.<sup>2</sup>

But the question must be raised, how applicable are these lessons to our own lives?

When I say that I want to live as a nomadic hunter-gatherer, the most common reaction is that it is simply not doable at this point. The biggest issue is population. The only thing six billion people can do is die. My hope is that the planet doesn't go with us. But assuming we take some agency and bring the collapse while working to bring people back into their own wildness, then the much talked about die off might be avoidable, or at least largely so. Honestly though, I don't see the massive die off being as much of an issue unless the civilizers have their way and take their empires to the logical conclusion: complete destruction of all life.

Most likely, I think we're going to see a larger decrease in births than the often-proposed number of deaths. But there is no question that a lot of people will die in the process. As any challenge to carrying capacity, this is an unfortunate matter of inevitability and the impact of which we can only work to lessen. Most people take this as an argument for reforming civilization, but even if that were possible, it only makes a larger die off inevitable.

How civilization collapses isn't the topic right here, what life

might be like after the collapse is. We can expect that the population over the first hundred years will drop drastically and likely stabilize. So the question is how people might live. The lifeway of the nomadic hunter-gatherer is no doubt the most sustainable way of living. As we've seen it is the most adaptive and most egalitarian way of being. For both social and ecological reasons, that is important. The idea that there isn't enough wildness left for this way of living is actually more of an argument for it. If wildness is running thin, then it is all the more important to adapt a nomadic way of life. That keeps any particular area from being overrun even further and requires more social fluidity to challenge the social holdovers of our own civilization. The more active effort we take now to help rewild places or let them grow back over, the better things look for human society in the future.

A lot of anarchists and folks who are skeptical of how much longer this civilization can last talk about the importance of gardening. I'm a bit reserved about this, not necessarily because of theoretical reasons but because of practical issues. The one message that I hope people can learn from the history of domestication is that humans, like any other animal, aren't meant to control the world and dictate its relationships. No doubt a horticultural society is largely more sustainable and far more in touch with wildness than any of us, but the amount of effort it takes to learn about gardening and the effort taken to plant them seems far more research and work than it would take to spread native seeds. Native plants grow with their bioregions: they come together with a number of other species to function together as a whole. There is no question about their ability to sustain themselves.

A garden is invasive. Especially a garden that takes the plants that we know now. The gardens of horticulturalists work with the forest, they are built around the importance of not abusing the soil. You can't simply take the plants that we know and plant them in these types of gardens. Tomatoes, corn, beans, grains, and the like need certain environments to grow. Some native species exist, but most of what we have needs gardens that look more like mini-fields: they are weeded and planted in rows. So I think the real question is how much effort is needed to plant and maintain this kind of garden versus the amount of effort taken to spread native seeds and let the forest regrow on its own.

I think there is also an issue about whether or not this kind

of society is going to be more vulnerable to raids than a nomadic one. While I have a personal preference for the life and wildness of a nomadic hunting and gathering life way, I don't have any flat out opposition to gardener societies. I have no intent of preaching to the horticulturalists and trying to convert them to hunter-gatherers. My critique is not aimed at them, it is meant for those of us who are living within civilization and are facing the oncoming collapse. If we're looking to go anywhere, I wonder why we wouldn't want to go for the most egalitarian and sustainable way of living.

True, this takes a number of changes in our own lives and that'll take more than turning to the garden instead. But we need to think in the long term. What kind of societies do we want our children and the future ones to be living in? We would be arrogant to think that the organic flow of society wouldn't take the turn that nearly every other horticulturalist society has: towards warfare, increased infanticide, and the like. Of course, they're all fine with these things, but that's a cost of challenging carrying capacity. And these things will no doubt arise again if growth is to be checked. If we are talking about the societies we want to create or live in, then the least we can do is to talk honestly about them.

Agriculture is increasingly no longer a viable option. It is highly degrading socially and ecologically. One of the primary reasons past civilizations have collapsed and likely a primary reason our own will collapse. When the forests are cut, the relationships intertwined with them go too. Topsoil is torn off and left exposed. The last remainders of healthy ecosystems wash off into drainages leading to diverted and harmed rivers. The only reason civilization has lasted this long is that there have been new places to move to and chemicals to delay the inevitable. The vast fields that feed this civilization are running dry and simply cannot support the fields they once did. There is not the room for recreating this kind of living even on a micro-scale. Nor would I hope many people would want to.

There is still some time to react to what we know about civilization and about wildness. There is time to work to apply some of these implications in our own lives and on the large scale.

What keeps us from getting from here to there is the rooting of their domestication. When we see it for what it is then we have the ability to undo it. We have the ability to attack. That is something that cannot be taken from us, we only believe it has. What we do

with this understanding is in our own hands.

2005

*Endnotes*

1. Petr Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: a Factor of Evolution*. Boston: Extending Horizons, undated [1902]. Pgs. 104-5. Note that when Kropotkin was writing this, “savage” was a schematic definition of hunter-gatherers and some horticulturalists rather than the derogatory one it is now.
2. See my essay ‘Agents of Change,’ also in this book.

# What Is The Totality?

It is the high residues of hazardous and potentially lethal chemicals inside your fat cells. It is you, sitting inside and turning on the television or computer on a beautiful day. It is you, shopping when you are depressed. It is the feeling you get that something is missing. It is your worries that a fire may destroy all of your possessions and your plans to try and take them with you. It is the thought that tells you to go on a diet. It is the excess fat on your body. It is the headache that won't go away. It is the bleeding in your intestines from years of pain alleviating drug use. It is the birth defects of your children. It is your killer when you die from a car accident. It is your savior when it attempts to fill your void for you. It is your carpal tunnel syndrome. It is your tumor. It is your expensive coffin and burial clothing. It is the drugs you take when you need an escape. It is the bulldozer that destroyed the woods you might have known so well. It is the towering skyscraper that makes you feel forever tiny and powerless. It is your boss. It is the minimum wage: it is the maximum wage.

It is your prison: sometimes with bars, sometimes without. It is all your fears. It is what is keeping you up at night. It is the lock on your door. It is the bullet in your gun. It is your noose and your tie. It is that thing that you don't want to do, but you feel that you have to. It is the turned cheek. It is the cold shoulder. It is the ad that tells you the Internet will provide affection for you. It is the new appliance that you never knew existed, but you can't live without. It is poverty. It is inequality. It is the sink or swim economy. It is the thing that has categorized you. It has stopped you from doing the

things you want. It is what makes you jealous. It is your hate. It is your love. It is your prerogatives that you feel might be somewhat strange. It is your clenched fist. It is your mace.

It is the police. It is the nightstick. It is the protester and the media that tells you not to listen to them. It is the corporation, which creates a new truth for you daily, one that provides you with the knowledge to buy what they make with confidence. It is the gold star you earned in kindergarten. It is the A you got in high school. It is your college degree. It is your paycheck. It is your therapist. It is your bill from the medicine you bought to “fix your brain.”

It is the ache in your back. It is your swollen knees. It is your worsening eyesight from the incandescent glow of our institutions. It is your hearing loss. It is the “white noise” that drives you crazy. It is your adrenaline. It is the tears that pour down your face after a sad movie. It is your longing for a dramatic romance with a happy ending. It is your lust for sex. It is the objectified woman and the powerless man. It is the rapist. It is the murderer. It is the thief. It is the profiteer. It is the worker. It is the dead union organizer.

It is the soldier who is willing to kill and die for cheaper oil. It is the victims of a government enflamed over unwillingness to follow their way of life. It is the activist hung for saying they don’t want to be killed for profits. It is the rubber bullet. It is pepper spray. It is the extinct species. It is the dying world. It is polluted air. It is tainted water. It is the accident at the nuclear power plant. It is the oil spill. It is the break in the pipeline. It is the brakes that failed. It is dwindling biodiversity. It is the patented seed. It is the farmer killing themselves with the pesticides that were supposed to make life better. It is the seat belt that mangled you, but didn’t kill you entirely. It is the blood dripping from the cut you got at work, but can’t afford to let it heal. It is the concrete beneath your feet. It is the stairs you fall down. It is the train that went off the tracks. It is the plane that blew up. It is the boat that sank. It is the drink you take to just forget it all. It is your misery. It is your world.

It is everything to you. It is civilized existence and the mindset that maintains it. It is what makes devastation seem not so shocking. It takes you through the day. It dulls you out at night. It gives you nightmares: it gives you dreams. It is your feeling of not having accomplished enough. It is your desire to have a child to complete yourself. It is the physical and mental barriers of civilized life. It is civilization and it has become you. It is a mindset. It is power. It

is physically reinforced to block off the reality of its powerlessness by mediating human existence from the natural world. It is the feeling of superiority, which supplies the reason to destroy all else. It is unnatural. It will fall, but will you fall with it? It is personal and it is individual. It is defeatable and its defeat is needed for our liberation, as well as for that of all else that humankind has set out to conquer and overpower. The path to freedom is only a thought away. Liberate the mind and the body will follow.

2000

# The Creation of Disaster

*This essay was written immediately after the January 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, India which resulted in nearly 20,000 dead and over half a million homeless. It is a response to that situation, but the same can be said about the large scale natural disasters that occur regularly and are a direct consequence of cities and permanent villages. Though this is a response to a particular disaster, the place and time are simply interchangeable, but the point remains the same.*

One can't help but feel remorse for the thousands of victims involved in the massive earthquakes that recently hit India. Despite your political views, the kind of hardships many have had to endure because of this incident has granted a good deal of sympathy from those aware of the situation.

But what are the lessons being learned? Is the aid sent with the notion that it will help rebuild the areas that have been struck or will it go to help prevent? Either way, the most likely outcome will be that the tragedy will go down in history books and the dead mourned, but India will rebuild, and business will go on once again. That is till the next earthquake or other natural disaster strikes. This wouldn't be unlikely, as it is how every other major disaster of recent times has been treated. This isn't the first or last incident of this caliber and type to occur, so what do we do? We rebuild and move on, with more effort and passion than before, to help uphold the impossible ideal that we can sustain our way of life.

It is becoming more and more necessary that we reassess this recurring situation. The mentality that no matter what cards

nature deals us—even if those cards are dealt by global warming or underground testing of nuclear arms or some other necessary evil of progress—we will endure, and each time with more vigor and endurance. Every time a disaster of this type occurs, we treat it as if nature has done us wrong. In many cases, we don't even offer more than sympathy and aid to those who suffered, primarily out of joy that it wasn't us who were forced to endure such hardships. Either way we turn a blind eye to the reality of the issue: that nature acts in cycles that we cannot possibly understand.

### *The Balance of Nature and Our Attempts to Refuse It*

The cycles of nature are completely different than any human cycle that has been created. The cycles of nature are built upon a balance, which has kept the natural world functioning for its millions of years of existence. They are unpredictable and chaotic. They will never come and go in the same way or even have the same individual effects. The only sure thing they will do is catalyze the life cycles of all living things. This is what provides the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, and everything else that allows life to occur on this planet. Is it disaster? No, disaster entails destruction in a very negative sense. It implies misfortune and death. Is a life cycle something destructive? Of course it is not. There may be death involved in it, yet it is not the end of life, but the flourishing of life. Nature will replace and renew itself; this is essential to life. The outlook that death is something to be mourned is another part of our self-removal from the whole of nature.

So how does this become a disaster? It's obvious that there is misery involved when things like the earthquake in India, massive floods, ravaging fires, and so on occur, but why is this? Did the earth in India suddenly open up and devour thousands of bodies or did the movement of the crust cause the foundations of the unsustainable, aboveground structures to be offset, and in most cases, pushed to the point of collapse? Despite our growing up with science fiction and outrageous stories of action and adventure, we know that the Earth does not open up and swallow thousands of lives when an earthquake hits. So the obvious problem is that the misery is caused by the fact that our towering cities cannot bear the cycles of the Earth. This has been the reason for lots of highly paid developers to try to create foundations that can take slight movements in

the Earth's crust. However, it has not been the reason for a mass rethinking of the foundations of civilized thought. Incidents like this are signs of the Earth screaming, "enough is enough!" but we're not listening. Instead we come together to combat our loss of domination to nature and work to reclaim our throne.

There is something inherently wrong here.

What constitutes a disaster? Or better yet, what causes the misery of a disaster? This Earth has been inhabited for millions of years by billions of species, yet civilized humans seem to be the only ones who fear the natural cycles. Why is this?

The foundations of civilization are obvious: humans created a situation of modifying their surroundings to suit a lifestyle that would provide them with more of what they wanted. Was it all humans? No. Isn't it because we are formed in the image of God and the Earth is left for our dominion? No, we existed well before civilization and lived as all other species do, but it should be no surprise that the idea of God only arose when it came to tricking the mass of people who would have otherwise been slaughtered by a thoroughly convinced minority. The idea of gods gave justification for the war humankind would wage on nature to become its kings. Does this mean that there is no god, creator, or some kind external power? I would say so, seemingly the great percentage of all humans to have ever existed would agree. Regardless, it is obvious that there is no glory in the mass destruction civilization has caused on nature and its inhabitants. With or without God, we are headed towards suicide.

### *Polluting the Web of Life*

All living beings are dependent upon the web of life. Even more than we are willing to acknowledge. We couldn't maintain the bare minimum of necessary functions without it. This dependency is fixed upon the cycles of life, and while there is room for change, it requires balance. When balance is lost at one end of the cycle, the entire web will be affected. This is not uncommon, that is why nature goes through cycles to keep the balance of life in order. All things follow this basic rule of existence, those who don't become extinct or fall back in line. This is how life works, whether we like it or not. As the case would be, about 10,000 years ago, a group of *Homo sapiens* decided they didn't like it. Or at least we are told that

they decided they didn't like it, in reality few changes of this nature were perceptible in real time.

The mass of *Homo sapiens* lived by gathering and hunting. But supposedly, this group decided that they would partake in full-scale stewardship of the Earth. Unlike other groups, this one required a change to the order of things. The amount of change gradually increased as the dependency and surplus led to excesses in population and need for more resources. In line with this change was settlement. In order to consistently grow food, there needed to be a constant and long-term involvement with certain areas of land. This is where the dependency on the web of life moved to become a dependency on sameness. In order to provide for the group, there needed to be a certain amount of food available. Any unforeseen blow to this would result in devastation, as long as alternative means of survival were not available.

As any of us can see as we look upon our current situation, that group grew, and conquered until it required the entire planet to play different parts in providing the necessary elements for survival. The foundation of this has been stability of the land. The majority of physical structures have risen in the last five centuries and has required constant maintenance, or they become subject to the laws of gravity. They are built upon the impossible idea that nature will refrain from its life cycles where we have placed our flags of domination.

This brings us to our current state of disasters.

### *The Disaster of Dependency*

In the case of an earthquake, non-civilized life would feel little effect. There is always the possibility of a tree falling on an unsuspected animal, but this is in light of our situation; in which a building will collapse, becoming a tomb for thousands of unsuspecting inhabitants. The first situation, which may cause temporary hardship, is by no means a large-scale center of devastation. When a city is torn apart, it becomes a prolonged hardship. The people in the city are dependent upon life following the synthetic cycles of civilization. If there is no food on the shelves at the grocery store, they will starve. If their workplace is smashed by such an incident, they won't have the money to buy food. If something like a fire were to wipe out their living space, they would be left with little

and their own lives would be at stake. In all cases, the surrounding communities may provide some help, but what of the case of such magnitude as India's earthquake?

The message is clear, as long as we are dependent on some impossible ideal of sustained life cycles in order to meet the needs of a synthetic society, our existence is futile. The earthquake in India is one of many warning signs that our lifestyles are out of balance with nature, and if we don't do something to change it, we face certain extinction.

The earthquake of India is an extreme warning. Many may feel that they are living in an area where they are unlikely to share the fate of the thousands of Indians. We need not look far to see the warnings closer to home, or in them for that sake. Almost every day on the news you will hear of the tragic deaths of a family who were sleeping when a fire took their lives and all earthly possessions. Or maybe one member awoke and nearly died while trying to save all the possessions they couldn't live without. The cigarette someone flicked on their yard, or the pot they accidentally left on their stove, or the electrical outlet with faulty wiring, or the gas leak in the furnace may have started the fire. There are a million ways to die in any of our modern structures. A fire is just an example, trying to prevent this inevitable possibility won't keep you from falling down the stairs, or from having a sharper possession seriously wound you in a strange accident that you never thought would happen. These things happen thousands of times per day and we turn the blame for each incident towards whatever target is available. The reality of the situation is that there is an entire system at work here that is self perpetuating.

### *The Failure of Control*

Control is a central component to civilization. The control of nature is impossible. This hasn't stopped us though, our reasons for attempting to control nature's cycles are obvious: they destroy what we work so hard to build and maintain. Erosion takes its toll on the strip malls we build. Gravity takes it toll on skyscrapers. And when we strip the tops of mountains and hills away, the winds and rains are destroying more and more of the structures we build in their old places. There is no stopping nature, and our attempts will fall back on us.

This is especially clear when it comes to “forest management.” We have specialists who spend years in schools learning how to extract resources from nature in a way that may allow some life to still exist beyond its direct resource needs. This is of course not exempt from the massive deception and corruption instilled in proclaiming ourselves rulers of this world.

A forest fire is not necessarily a disaster, no matter how hard we pretend one is. What happens in a forest fire is beyond our capacity of knowledge to understand. It is becoming increasingly clear though that what is taking place is a revitalization of life in the forests. However, when we sanction the remnants of nature off into parks, we have to provide a service to those who feel they pay for them to not be cut down. That is, those parks exist for the amusement of the city-living taxpayers. So they have to keep the parks in order for those who come to see them, and to let a fire play itself out naturally could be devastating. So in the name of preservation, a forest fire is doused with chemicals, which will later find their way back into rivers and streams, soil and air, and the bodies of all life. Of course, this also includes unnatural fires, such as those caused by campers without the decency to watch their own flames.

There is a fear that the fire will spread to nearby cities. Again, this is the disaster of our dependency. Indigenous and non-human societies never worried themselves of these things, because they aren't a threat. Fires didn't brew in basements and gas lines, as they obviously don't have these things. They don't wipe out a society's surplus if they don't have one. It can be a hardship, but it is not nearly as deadly as it is to us. Nonetheless, this doesn't stop us from trying to control nature. We poison the environment and ourselves to give the image that we can sustainably control nature. It is beyond our control.

### *The Faulty Foundations of Civilization*

The foundations of civilization are built upon shortsightedness. We see only what is resourceful for us, but the entire web of life is beyond our contemplation. When we exterminate insects or rodents, we don't understand why there has been an increase in the population of other demarcated pests. The web of life balances itself, when we only see the parts closest to use, and carry forth with

no respect for life outside of that, we throw the balance off. When we clear-cut the rainforests, we don't understand why the trees aren't healthy like the ones before. This is because we didn't know that they need bacteria that take hundreds of years to flourish, but we destroyed them all when we cleared out the forest beforehand. It's not an issue of lack of knowledge, it's just a fact that civilization has refused to acknowledge: life is too complex to try to understand all of its functions.

We aren't meant to understand it all, only to carry out our part of the cycles. When we stepped out of our cycles and set forth towards domination of the planet and its inhabitants we overlooked this basic fact. Towards the point of near total domination (taking us into the very core of life as we know it, DNA), we are realizing the results of our shortsightedness.

Centuries of carefree industrialism have caused massive implications for the ecosystems, and the reality of this has been hitting us in the face and giving us tumors for years now. Obviously, this should be ground for a massive rethinking of the basic assumptions of civilizations. However, it's only led to a green-washing of the industrial system and massive trickery on the part of public relations. We still live by the dictum of "progress by any means necessary." The circle of "necessary evils" is constantly expanding to meet the level of resources needed to fuel this death culture. Our rationality of determining what we will allow to happen in order to fill our consumptive lifestyles is pulling from the depths of greed in the name of our representation-turned-god, money.

Our air, water, soil, and the very essences of life are being polluted. We live by the out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality as we throw out what we feel we have no use for into the heaping trash mounds that surround our cities. It now goes beyond those limits, our trash is now being poured into space and underwater. All this just to keep up the idea that we are superior and exist outside the realm of nature. To keep up the idea that we have the ability to control it, and determine its fate: that we can reach into DNA and manipulate evolution to keep up with the diseases, themselves the byproducts of our industrialized technological existence. We are covering our ears to the warnings of nature that this is not so, but that won't keep the consequences from pushing us into extinction. We have to start listening, and ask ourselves, "is it worth it?"

*Learning Lessons From Destruction*

It is beyond obvious that we are not meant to rule nature. What is it that we are holding on to that we can't just let go of? Our mediated existence, the future we constantly look forward to but never reach, anticipation of not having to work anymore to meet the basic needs of survival, all our material possessions that could be wiped away in an unpredictable fire or earthquake-induced collapse, yet we would be willing to die for. The whole of civilized existence is a burden, upon the planet and upon our own lives. How long will we try to hold up the impossible empire? How long will we try to justify our destruction, when the very thing we are worshipping could destroy us at any second?

Our lives are at risk in civilization. We never know what disaster could happen or when, but we are trapped. Everything around us could take our lives and what would we have to show for it aside from a contribution to the impossible dream, and it won't be shedding a tear at your funeral. Disasters are one of the many costs of civilization and settlements, they will occur as long as these things exist. So do we start listening to the warnings or do we learn lessons from societies that function in balance with nature? One solution ends in disaster and the other solution is life. It's up to us to choose which will be our fate and to act upon this decision.

2001

# Everywhere and Nowhere: The Pathology of the Machine

*In order to rationalize our industrial-military complex, we have to destroy our capacity to see clearly any more what is in front of, and to imagine what is beyond, our noses.*

- R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*<sup>1</sup>

*There's no light at the end of the Carpal Tunnel.*

- Bob Black, *Anarchy After Leftism*<sup>2</sup>

Technology is about taking. It always has been and always will be.

Whether we're talking about relatively regional civilizations or our global civilization, the irrigation canals of Cahokia or the tanks of the U.S. Army, technology is about a system that always requires more. More fuel, more resources, more operators, more consumers, more attention, and more devotion: more of everything and anything.

And that excess comes from somewhere. Somewhere and everywhere there are “necessary evils”—work, rent, bills, war—but we overlook them. We see it as give and take: we work and they sell us gadgets. We spend more hours working to make more money to buy more things that are supposed to save us time. We pour into this system, this technological system, so that we can get stuff in return. So that we can take part in a history in the making: we can internalize the machine and its progress. It becomes our pride, it gives us meaning while it takes it away, and it becomes our basis for identity.

Technology is power materialized. Without taking and giving something very real—that is, things you can see, feel, hear, and smell—the domesticators would have never been able to enact the power their gods only spoke of. Like gods, technology becomes something to fear and love. It became another thing to turn to so that we don't see, feel, hear, and sense the world that is of and around us. From the steel plow to self-heating coffee mugs, we become absorbed by the technological system.

And we are blinded by the halogen light. The larger the system, the less able we are of seeing the consequences. We don't see where the taking is or where the losses are. But we don't have to look far for either. We just have to learn how to look and step back to see outside of the mass-produced visions of the domesticators, to walk away from the 24-hour neon crucifix, power locks, and heated seats to understand the nature of the machine: it must grow and it must absorb or eliminate everything that stands before it.

Through this absorption, our communities, our world, and our being are taken away. We are absorbed into something larger than ourselves, larger than our bioregionally rooted minds and cultures, and drawn into the fate of a self-destructive culture.

On April 12, 1893, in the arid lands of southern Africa, the technological system laid one of many monuments to its own efficiency.

There a camp of 90 Witbooi women, children, and some men were sleeping as the sun arose. As they slept, the colonizing German army crept up to deliver their final compromise in the struggle over the land that those Witbooi and their ancestors had lived on for thousands of years. This was meant to be a final move in a struggle between two cultures that would have never known about each other only decades before.

In a matter of 30 minutes, 16,000 rounds were fired from 200 rifles, laying the entire camp to rest.<sup>3</sup> The Gatling gun, in its 32<sup>nd</sup> year of existence, made colonization a much faster and more efficient ordeal. The expanding German Empire and the globalizing European civilization that spawned it needed more resources. And more must always come from somewhere. On that day, the somewhere was in southern Africa, which today remains one of the largest suppliers of such technological necessities as gold and diamonds. The 90 Witbooi killed just happened to stand in the way.

That same year the motion picture made its premiere.  
Take and give.

If anyone is familiar with the consequences of technology, the ones we are psychologically incapable of comprehending, they are those who have historically lived without it. That is Earth-based cultures, the hunter-gatherers, the small-scale horticulturalists and pastoralists.

These are societies who are no stranger to tool use (like many other non-human animals). But tools are different. Made from stone, wood, bone, and hide, they can be, and are by necessity, mechanically simple. They require skill and knowledge over resources. A knapped flint blade leaves behind smaller pieces of flint, not industrial waste. This kind of tool use is reflective of their cultures, which can face any amount of ecological and social turbulence, but are lasting.

That is, are lasting so long as they aren't destroyed by another culture. One that, as one Huaorani man put it, "killed by destroying the source of all life."<sup>4</sup> Flourishing through thousands of years, these are cultures faced most recently with the threat of extermination at the hands of a techno-industrial civilization reaching back less than two centuries. Ethnocide, or the death of culture, for the Huaorani is just one cost "for the sake of enough oil to meet U.S. energy needs for thirteen days."<sup>5</sup>

Thirteen days. That's one country's energy consumption for one entire culture, barely less than two weeks.

It would be worse if it weren't an isolated case. Indigenous communities throughout Northern America face ethnocide, removal, and genocide to make way for coal, uranium, copper, gold, silver, bauxite, molybdenum, and zeolite mines, oil and natural gas, logging, dams, and their homes are turned into locations for power plants and waste sites.<sup>6</sup> Trains and guns were once used to exterminate buffalo herds to deprive the Indigenous societies of the North American Plains, now toxic waste turns fish into carcinogens, global warming melts ice sheets and drowns polar bears, and lead contamination from strip mines makes ground water lethal.

You have the same story throughout the world. Before urban development stretched into the Amazon, colonization came through road building to clear land for ranchers and to harvest rubber trees, bringing in logging and mining, and, more recently massive hydroelectric dams.<sup>7</sup> What started in Asia, Northern Africa, and Europe

spread throughout the world as technology became more advanced and continually required more to carry on: to carry on the process of growth and expansion. It moves, uprooting communities along the way, leaving processed and domesticated grains, imposed and enforced morality, clothing, and steel tools in its wake.

Taking and giving. Rising and falling.

Destroying to produce nothingness.

And for what? What are the benefits of this great and mighty system that can turn the Earth into another thing, another consumable and rejectable object?

We try to justify what we've gotten from the process. And so-called radicals have even tried to save those supposed positives from the rest of the technological system. But while they agree that colonization and the destruction accompanying it are horrid and, they believe, unnecessary elements of a technological society, they ignore the reality of technology: it destroys in far more ways than one.

Some of the worst damage wrought by the technological system is what it does to our minds. As the ever-expanding boundaries of the technological reality spread out and connect with more people, the more we become enmeshed in the system, and the more isolated we become.

Humans, like all animals, are bioregional and communal by nature.

We need community, and the way Earth-based cultures live promotes this. Technology is about isolation: the system demands specialization. To produce a “labor-saving” technology like steel tools, iron must be mined, the ore must be smelted, and it must be reshaped into something useful. Those doing the mining, smelting, reshaping, or those involved in the shipping or distributing of the materials or the finished product, or those doing the bartering or selling of that product, aren't likely to be the ones putting it to use if it is a plow or something used directly in the production of food. There is a new distance that is created and the person selling those tools isn't going to see the same amount of destruction that the miner will see on a daily basis or notice the consequences of that mine like someone directly involved with providing food will. Nor will they necessarily know about the use of other steel tools in clearing out more land for more mines.

That kind of disconnect is inherent in the system. And the

psychological disconnect is the same. In Earth-based communities, culture is shaped over hundreds and thousands of years. It becomes inseparable from the lack of mediation from the Earth and from each other. These cultures have adapted responses and methods for dealing with any problems that are likely to arise.

Let's look at warfare. Warfare is something particular to domesticated societies, whether they are Earth-based or not. Nomadic hunter-gatherers lack warfare because they are freer from concepts of territoriality and without dependence upon gardens or storehouses, can simply move, split up or merge with surrounding camps during times of ecological hardship. There is little to be staked out and defended and, even more importantly, with looser kin and social relationships between bands, even less to defend against. Kin-based identity becomes more important only when gardens and storehouses arrive and the need to own their surrounding hunting territory arises. That is, when people become rooted to a particular spot to the point that its use by others is competitive rather than collective.

As societies settle, or become domesticated, scarcity becomes a problem. The more dependent a society becomes on particular plants, animals, or weather patterns, the more they have to fear. If a horticulturalist village expands and its neighbors are expanding or aren't moving, then eventually there will be a problem.

There's an ecological term for this: carrying capacity. Carrying capacity is how much life can be supported by any given bioregion at any particular time. But it's more than an ecological concept; it's the reality that every living being must answer to if they push their presence too far. And that does happen from time to time. It doesn't have to be a major issue, but some human societies created a larger problem because storing and domesticating foods bends carrying capacity. That makes a village possible where a band had previously only camped before.

This is not without consequence. The bioregion and what is grown or taken from it becomes a resource and others are competitors. And this begins the cycles of war that characterize domesticated societies. Though domesticated, small-scale horticultural and pastoral societies are still Earth-based; they are still without a technological system such as metal tools, irrigation, and urbanization. The kind of social and ecological stresses they feel are hardly abstract: there are too many mouths to feed on too little

land. War, in the form of raids or battles, is the initial response, and becomes a primary occupation of the culture at large. A preference for male warriors leads to higher rates of female infanticide, revenge for lives lost in battle spur raids, and the result is less mouths to feed and the occasional shattering of villages into new places or to be absorbed by other villages.<sup>8</sup>

You see this happening over and over again in horticultural and pastoral societies from South America through North America, Africa, Eurasia, Polynesia, and Micronesia.

Brutal as it might sound, this is the culture that these societies have grown into and the one they have and will continue to fight to maintain. But we're kidding ourselves when we think that this is somehow an archaic arrangement. As the death toll in Iraq has well passed 20,000 lives lost, we should consider the words of a more open U.S. President Jimmy Carter in response to attacks in 1980 on what he called one of the "vital interests of the United States of America," the Persian Gulf and its oil: attacks "will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."<sup>9</sup> That's a response that the U.S. and other oil hungry countries have surely not backed away from. We could just as easily point to villages bulldozed and fenced off in Mexico that force movement and dependence on Maquilladoras, or sweat shops with company stores and their debt, or to the plight of the eastern cougar, or to any number of the places mentioned earlier.

The eternal somewhere, nowhere and everywhere: the shit fields of the technological system.

At least the warring horticulturalists know whose blood is on their hands.

But we have more in common with the horticulturalists and pastoralists than their cycles of warfare: they too have suffered the consequences of modern technology.

The mediation, the distance and isolation of technology, is about more than just pulling us away from the rest of the world. It is about uprooting our community and bioregionally defined being from its very essence. The result is a blood thirsty, unchecked insanity. Like Joseph Conrad's Col. Kurtz, we destroy because nothing is stopping us. Technology turns our hearts to the darkness it creates.

For Arctic hunters, like the Inuit, technology turned the vitally communal seal hunts into a solitary act where the only

companionship a hunter has is with his gun and outboard motor. He returns to smaller and smaller camps, in many places even the dogs are replaced by snowmobiles. Community disappears and culture becomes a warped mirror of what it once was.<sup>10</sup> Depression reigns, canned foods bring the highest rate of diabetes in any human population, and the tools that one Arctic hunter used can be seen on display in places like the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Where the bastard godchildren of industrialists can see relics of the community they're searching for, but never able to see.

The gun, the imported food in steel cans, the combustion engine and its oil.

Harpoons, dog sleds, community, and seal skin kayaks.

Giving and taking.

The Carnegie Museum built its altar to the gods of Progress on soil stained in the blood of the technological system. Like the Arctic, it is the place where culture was and is being killed by forced relocation and an influx of technology. But unlike the Arctic hunters, the lives of the Monongahela were not lost to any direct trade. They were horticulturalists, like the Erie to the north, the Susquehannocks to the east and the nations of the Haudousaunee to the Northeast.

Like the other horticulturalists we've looked at already, there was a rough pattern of affinity and warring that created a rather static state of existence throughout what would be called the northeastern United States. You had these cycles of war, kept in check by a degree of inefficient weaponry, and the lack of mediation that the faceless technology modern warfare makes possible.

That changed in the early 1600s.

The growing, stratified technological system of Western Europe was expanding and needed more resources. Sadly the invention of quicker transportation over water made it possible for the dense populations of cod in the Atlantic coast to be caught, stored, and sold in shops in Britain. The fishers began setting up inland camps where they met local Algonkians: a people with no technology, but a sudden interest in what these fishers had to offer. The fishers took an equal interest in the furs of the natives and set in motion one of the most tragic stories of our history: the fur trade.

The new steel tools and other mass produced junk of Empire flooded into Algonkian hands at the expense of a demand for furs

that the natives had neither known nor had to deal with before. The rough boundaries and alliances of a quickly declining era were radically altered by the demand for trapping grounds and another resource war took place. But unlike past wars, there was a new element: the gun.

The gun, like the trades, created a new kind of society where power was granted by property and trade alone, where age-old affiliations and kin networks were tossed aside to recreate a mirror of European politics. A new kind of political economy emerged as European nations used the natives as pawns for their own ongoing territorial battles. The Iroquoian Empire was created by the British in 1677 to stake a rightful claim of discovery against the French. While Europeans battled this out, it was native blood being spilled.

Technology is the key factor: the prior system of alliances and war kept things in check, but there was no precedent for the kind of damage technology could inflict. There was never a reason to create checks against a technology that never existed before. So the natives had no way to realize or cope with the nature of technology until it was far too late. Too late came quickly: by 1660, every Iroquois who could own a gun did. And in a war of the Iroquois against the Susquehannock over access to central Pennsylvania into Ohio for trapping, the Erie and Monongahela were wiped out between 1630 and 1680.

They never had to meet a European to fall victim to the consequences of their technological system.<sup>11</sup>

And for the Iroquois themselves, the dependence on the new technology caused a break up in bands into smaller kin groups and warrior sects. The loss of culture and community allowed the missionaries that followed in the footsteps of the fishers to carry on the civilizing that guns and steel tools had started.

This unfolds over and over again throughout the world where cultural traditions clash with the technology of modernity. For the notorious Amazonian horticulturalists, the Yanomami, access to steel tools became the primary motivation for the warfare that won them the title of “the Fierce People” and became the subject of sociobiological arguments for aggressiveness as the basis for humanity. No doubt, the irony of the situation has still rarely come to light.<sup>12</sup>

And that clash has taken on more literal terms.

The Maori of New Zealand are one example. Their culture is the product of a system of fishing, hunting, and horticulture that created a heavy dependence on surplus. Social stratification was firmly rooted in a highly divided society where kings and religious leaders could not even be touched by impure hands or tools. Like any society where the socio-political elite are untouchable, the same will apply for their gods.

In the early 1800s, muskets became a normalized part of the Maori warfare complex. But, like with the Iroquois, that distribution was never equal. Politicians would take powerful Maori warrior-chiefs on world tours and school them in the European political-war system. In one case, one Maori chief got 300 guns with ample ammo from a sympathetic British commander resulting in the death toll of over 2,000 enemy Maori with an equal number taken as slaves from a 3 month campaign.<sup>13</sup>

But before the guns were even efficient in themselves, they pulled on the traditional culture and ideas of gods for their power. As anthropologist Andrew Vayda observed, guns gave advantage in warfare “not so much because of the numbers killed...as because of the panic affected as a result by killing any of them.” He continues: “when defenders heard the noise of the guns without, as far as they could see, having been struck, they concluded that supernatural forces were at work.”<sup>14</sup>

This is an important point. The warfare of Earth-based cultures was never faceless. The changing pattern of affiliations and cycles of war still had enemies, but they were known enemies. The consequence of killing was rooted in cultural understandings of what happens to the dead and how they are to be avenged. But what constitutes killing is also culturally defined. If someone is killed by a spear, arrow or through witchcraft, everyone knows what is going on and what is going to happen. So they respond in kind.

Technology, being outside of the realm of direct experience and relationships, challenges this. The pastoral Nuer of Sudan now know this too well. Guns flooded their culture as Nuer boys and men were drafted as soldiers in the SPLA, the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army. That is, as a part of a violent nation-state turned ethnic war created by European nations battling for control over the region. The guns, not surprisingly, brought an extreme upsurge in Nuer homicide and the loss of culture. Not necessarily through

killing alone, but because the technology is so alien to their long-standing cultural understandings of the world: ones patterned by hundreds of years of bioregional and ecological influence.

Nuer responses and accountability for homicide were a part of their elaborately outlined spiritual world. It involved consequences for the deceased, the murderer, and their cattle. But this was all tied to one thing: the Nuer concept of killing. The gun-inflicted deaths of Nuer, by other Nuer or outsiders, had no place in their cosmology: there was no understanding of where this left the living or the dead. Like the Iroquoian warriors, this opened the door for the missionaries.<sup>15</sup>

Souls lost to the machine, taken again by the God that built them.

Genocide, ethnocide, omnicide: is it shocking to know that Sudan is one vital source for the Nile River? That is, the land the Nuer live on is the primary source for the most valued resource in northeastern Africa: water.<sup>16</sup> The very building block of life becomes another resource, another reason to take lives. All for industry. All for progress. All to feed the machine.

From the view of the modernizers and the technocrats, you have to give to take. And this is what we are being told; it is what those whom everything is taken from are told that we are all seeing.

The necessary evils: the broken eggs of progress.

And, ultimately, it becomes repackaged as the salvation of the machine.

It's easy to look at these things and see them as a tragic misconception or faults of Indigenous societies to stop their supposed complacency in the processes of ethnocide and genocide. We can look at these downsides of technology in use or ignore the relationship between all of this and the necessary expansion of the technological system.

But if we think that we are any different or any more prepared to deal with technology, then Stanley Milgram proved us wrong.

Milgram was a social psychologist with a particular interest in obedience. His interests led to what would become one of the most controversial experiments and analysis of the last century. The experiment brought in random people who were, as they would believe, going to give another experimental subject a series of electrical shocks as dictated by the conductor of the experiment. The person receiving the shocks was an actor who would respond

how any person would if given the relative amount of electrocution: from initial reactions along the lines of “what is going on here” to protests to agonizing screams. What Milgram found was shocking: nearly all the subjects would give strong to extremely intense shocks before they would refuse to give them as told. Twice as many would carry on if the actor was further away, but could still be heard.<sup>17</sup>

The experiment was focused on obedience to authority, but there are two things in particular that apply to this subject: the authority granted to the experimenter through their technology and the disconnection between the person giving the shocks and the screams of the victim because of the technology.

You don’t need a lab to remind us of how powerful these things are. When some technology exists, it is treated as something that just is and always will be. In a fatalistic sense, it becomes accepted as a part of our reality. Genetic engineering, for example, gets its share of protest, but little to no outrage, even as diseases have nearly doubled in the short period since they’ve become widely used. We could look even closer to everyday technologies like sewage systems and garbage. We don’t think about what happens when we can simply toss things to the curb or in a dumpster. We don’t have to think about how the psychoactive sedatives that are so widely taken are being pissed out and run back into the water supply with no method of filtration for them. That goes back into the rivers, lakes, streams, and oceans all finding their way back into the soil where our food grows. Nor are we confronted with the consequences of household chemicals, like fertilizers, insecticides, and fungicides that anyone in most countries could go to the store and pick up and spray outside at anytime. Nor do we think about the coal plants, strip mines, nuclear power plants, and the carnage they reap when we flip on a light switch.

We can wonder and be philosophically opposed, but these things are all just there. And their presence alone grants them a kind of authority that comes with the fatalistic view that’s been instilled in our minds. The necessary evils haunt us into inaction. They are the electric lullaby.

And it is the distance implicit in the technological system that makes it possible for us to go on ignoring all of this. To continue acting like there are no consequences for our actions while everyday life remains an ongoing catastrophe.

Milgram was interested in the study of obedience with a

particular question: are there evil and good people, or are people just following orders? What he saw from Hitler's concentration camps, Stalin's gulags, and, at that time, the ongoing war in Vietnam, disturbed him. And what he learned through interviews with those who took part in this wholesale destruction of life brings us back to the essence of technology: in order to inflict pain directly, they had to "counteranthropomorphize" their victims. That is they had to remove any human qualities from the people they would be destroying.

And there is another fitting term for this: reification, the process of turning life into things, lifeless objects. This is exactly what the technological system does, and exactly what the domesticators teach us to do. We must be disconnected from our being to cause this kind of destruction. No full being could ever tolerate this loss just as how we cannot comprehend what is really being lost.

So long as we are plugged in, we will never be able to come to this understanding.

As the Iroquois and Maori unwittingly took part in the destruction of their cultures, we unwittingly take part in the destruction of life, the uprooting of communities, and the dismemberment of our being.

This is the technological system. This is the consequence of its necessary disconnection.

And this is what we are given in return for a wholeness that we can no longer even contemplate.

It is a whole package that cannot be taken in parts. There is no good and bad technology: just as there are no consequence-free actions. We are thrown into a global world that we are psychologically incapable of understanding, where destruction is out of sight and out of mind.

But our bioregional, communal selves still lurk beneath the machinery. We are not different. And we can't wait any longer for a nice way to slowly turn the power off on this system or to try and put it to good use. The switch will never be willingly flipped.

It is up to us to pull the plug and let the system collapse.

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# Egocide

The primal war is a spiritual war. It began as the spirit of wildness was buried beneath the interests of domesticators: both within history and within ourselves.

At its core lies a spiritual connection, the wordless sense of being that flows through the world. It is not about fighting for nature or about individual desire. It is about egocide: killing the self/other split that underpins all civilized relationships.

There is no “nature,” alone and isolated outside of our grasp. There is only the life that is in, around, and of us. This is something that cannot be taught, written about, or described. It’s not filling in space for god/s, nothingness, economics, or science. It is not a cognitive force that hears every prayer.

I can’t say what it is that I feel. I can’t objectively prove its existence. But without my soul, I am as good as dead.

The domesticators have known this for a very long time.

I can say that I feel something. It’s something that I know is real. It’s something worth fighting for.

That’s something that wild people and places have been telling the rest of us for ten thousand years.

Humans, like all beings, are intrinsically spiritual. Not in the sense of elaborate ritual or religious beliefs or anything of that sort, but spiritual in a much different way: a lived spirituality.

There is a flowing, organic nature to the world. It’s something you can feel as you follow tracks through the new snowfall. Something felt in a handful of wild berries or the smell of roots. It’s something you see in the eyes of an animal as their pupils dilate for the last time. The sting of a thorn, the protests of squirrels, and the ambience of rain on leaves, the sound of rushing water: there is life

in all of these things. An essence that simply living brings you into.

The world of the nomadic hunter-gatherer knows no “other.” They have no concept of nature. But there is a greater connectivity. There is no sense of impending doom, no smallness or grandiose feeling. There is only life and death, interwoven and honestly laid out before you.

An individual exists as a part of this. Not in the manufactured sense of communistic groupthink, but in the spiritualistic sense. Life is inseparable. There is no dependency. There is no fear of a future. No path of progress. You can say there is an implicit sense of trust and honesty, but neither word does it justice. No word does it justice. Life simply is.

That needs to be restated: for most of us, life simply is an ideal. It's a utopian desire or an irretrievable past. We simply can get closer to it or we can't. But life can simply be life. It always has and always will be there. But we don't think of it like that. We can't think of it like that. We've been trained to see it differently. Life is simply something other: either as a religious or anti-religious ideal or as a deadened scientific definition.

It must always be distant.

How do you turn someone against themselves? Against those around them? How do you tame the spirit? These are the issues that domesticators have always had to answer. The necessary response is what makes up our everyday lives: to domesticate, you must break someone—mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Simply put, you must disconnect.

That disconnection, that mediation, has always been the primary goal of domesticators. The reason why is simple: domestication is about dependency. But that dependency is not about necessity, it's about perceived necessity. It all essentially comes down to belief.

Most people believe that the State and civilization are necessary now because we know nothing else. We are raised in a manufactured reality. A sterile, planned world complete with heated seats, air conditioning, and power locks. Food is the processed side-note to our consumption. Work is something you must do and the boss is someone you must obey.

The idea of living without civilization, and even more so, living well, is about as alien to us as the idea of living in this manufactured reality would be to anyone who lives without it. These are

intrinsically different ways of viewing and being in reality. One is about the vital freedom to choose between the lesser of two evils and the better of two brands. The other is about the difficult choice about which direction you feel like roaming in today and which leaf looks most tempting.

How did we get from the latter to the former? How did we come to accept so little from life? How did we become so dependent?

How did food in storehouses become more important than the world outside? Filling those storehouses with large amounts of wild grains or dried meat or fish is an easy enough thing to do. For the most part, it may take a few days for a huge amount of food for the societies willing to do so. Becoming the person to ration the surplus isn't that complicated either. Making people listen to that person, however, is.

The issue is about control. Power flows from control. But control requires physical and mental force. You can force someone into a cage, but it's another thing to get them to accept it.

To successfully gain control over another being, that cage must be internalized.

For us, unfortunately, that cage has been internalized. This is the domestication process at work.

No one gives up their autonomy freely. The spirit of wildness that flows through all life must be broken.

To break the spirit, you must first isolate it. This is both the hardest and most important thing that must be done. We are born physically and mentally for a life of nomadic hunting and gathering. Like wildness, like life everywhere, our spirit is inseparable from the world around us.

This needs some clarification.

I'm not talking about some New Age "oneness" anymore than I'm pushing for some kind of universalized "Indigenous perspective." I'm talking about an unmediated relationship with the world. I'm talking about something that is felt and known without words. Nearly all human societies that have existed lived with this spirit in their being. I'm talking about the same spirit that must be killed so that we can become who we are now. The spirit must be killed so that we can turn against ourselves and the Earth.

Killing that spirit is impossible. It exists in all life. But at some point people began burying it: began accepting cheap substitutes.

It was a long, hard, and isolated problem, but the original trauma of domestication is a deep wound. One that spreads quickly and destroys anything in its path: always moving and searching for some kind of meaning. What that meaning is will always change shape and form, but the seekers are trained to look everywhere and destroy anything that stands in the way.

We are trained to look everywhere but our own damaged souls. We are trained to look for something, but never to feel it. That, of course, is intentional.

No matter how we view the world—be it egocentric, anthropocentric, biocentric, etc—we must always see the Earth (read: nature) as someplace wholly separate. Certain people are and were a part of that (read: Indigenous), but that is gone, at least as far as we're supposed to be concerned. The Earth is a place, life is an ideal: you have only yourself.

Disconnected, lonely and desperate, we sink or swim in their reality. This is domestication. This is us occupying land that we have little sense of and alone in an environment flooded with billions of others.

This is your soul on Prozac.

The self/other split begins with domestication. You can't take control over a world that you are a part of. According to the monotheists, Adam and Eve took the first step by naming the animals in Eden. They may very well be right to a certain degree: life dissected and categorized is far more of an experiment than a community.

But the greatest damage was the one that turned life into property. It turned the spirit in wild grains, fish, and large mammals into surplus: into wealth. The world of the gardener turns the world of the hunter-gatherer into a world of weeds, crops, gardens-in-use, fallowing gardens, and the village. The farmer dissects that even further, into rows of crops in fields, animals-as-food or animals-as-workers, thinkers and doers, the sacred and the profane. The capitalist sees consumers, distributors, managers, producers, and guards.

The world of wildness becomes processed and refined. The spirit of all things becomes the spirit of all things deemed useful. The divide continues: we are no longer mere apes or wild beasts. We are the stewards of the Earth, the bringers of the future. Subject turned object.

The soul must be isolated to be re-contextualized.

This is done subtly at first. As people in some places did settle and did start taking to stored food, the initial roles for power began to emerge. But that power needed to be implicit even for the power of suggestion that Big Men would wield. This meant tinkering with the spirit. That became the job of shamans: the first specialists.

The role of the shaman spreads from the healer. A shaman is usually still a healer, but there is rarely a shortage of healers. For nearly all nomadic hunter-gatherers, healing is a communal activity. Healers deal with their reality through that communal spirit. Everyone is involved. The shaman, on the other hand, interprets that reality. That is an extremely important difference.

Many shamans only slightly inserted their message into their interpretations of the spirit. The most important idea was implicit in their existence: the soul of the world is more open to certain individuals. Their position was as mediator between the individual and the rest of the world. And through this, the seeds for a self/other split are born.

The message of the shaman, like the message of the preacher and the pundit, validates the social and political reality. As society becomes increasingly dependent on certain foods the gods become specialized to ensure their growth (sun, water, earth or soil, and seed). As the political realm becomes more hierarchical, so too does the cosmic one. As settlements become more permanent and spread into villages, the once unified world turns into the village, the gardens, and, beyond them, the forest. The dead become ancestors to fear as witches and sorcerers become the all-seeing eye of morality.

The interpretation of the world around us becomes subject to the ancestors, to gods, then to God and science. But at the base of it all this is the self/other split. The world of the nomadic hunter-gatherer based on cooperation and openness is replaced by competition and fear. People follow the hand that feeds as it substitutes their unmediated connection with the world through its vision.

First we split from the world and then we fear it. That's where domestication begins. Fear and dependency grow to the point where anything else is unthinkable and even more so, frightening.

This is the world we are born into. This is our dependency. This

is our inheritance.

We are raised to accept it and continue substituting the spirit of wildness for the soulless world of domestication and mediation. The only spirit left is the self.

In a dog-eat-dog world, you sink or swim.

Subject or object. At least that much is supposed to be up to you.

The domesticators have been at their job a long time. For the most part they are successful at replacing the total world that we know in our hearts with the totality they have placed around our minds. But their job can never be complete. They sedate, distract and occupy us, but the wildness will always slip through the cracks.

For too many the uncontrollable urge to live free is too far beyond reach. It ends in self-destruction or in the splitting of the mind.

The shell cracks only partially.

The totality of civilization in our minds is mirrored by the world it has created. Concrete, steel, glass, and iron do for the body what the church and State have done for the mind. Hierarchy and domination become structural. Our smallness and insignificance is constantly reinforced.

The revolt against civilization means that we must attack both internally and externally. In reality, there is no separation between the two. This attack is a response: a response to the totality we've been lulled into that seeks to destroy everything. For some that is meant literally. Their goal is to eliminate everything from concrete to nature so that you are free to do anything or go anywhere. It's a nihilistic rage that seeks honesty only where the individual remains isolated: to remove any and all conceivable chains.

To a degree I can understand this active nihilism. When everything you know feels tainted, it seems instinctive to deconstruct not only everything you know but also how you think and feel. It makes sense as part of a process of shedding the totality of civilization, but that is it. Far too often it is seen as a goal in itself: a methodology towards the radical purity and free from all constraint. It stands as a deadening response to the sterile corpse of the city and country.

But nihilism, like its more honest relative, egoism, fails to break free of that initial grasp of domestication: the self/other split. Both

rely on that isolation, that neverland of the self. To the nihilist and egoist there can be no greater connectivity without morality. The two oppositions remain: the self and the other.

The initial lie of the domesticators comes full circle.

Civilization kills the spirit. It must in order to exist.

We think, build, and maintain civilization. It is the reality created for us, the reality that we recreate daily. It is our addiction. It is everything we are given so that the soul cannot breathe: all the cheap replacements for wildness, for spirit. It is what we are given so that the spirit cannot remember wildness, so that we will no longer desire wildness.

It has always been this way. It must always be this way for civilization to exist.

It comes back to domestication.

But domestication is not irreversible any more than it is evolutionary. The spirits that refused to be tamed have always resisted it. Wild beings, human or not, have always fought against it: if not in mind and soul then in body.

This is the primal war: the refusal of life to be domesticated. It is the refusal of wildness to become ordered and civilized.

It is the spirit that refuses to die.

It is not about a certain people, place or time: it is about life. Those who know that spirit without mediation have always put up the hardest fight. There was no fight or revolution for abstract ideals, for some unknown or unknowable place of undefined and questionable freedom as individuals. The fight was about something felt, something innate.

The fight, then, now, and always, is the rage of the spirit of life and wildness. It knows no isolation or mediation. It grows through the cracks in the sidewalk and the refusal of toxins in our bodies. It will stop for nothing and it is extremely deadly.

It is within us, anxiously waiting. It cries for the healing of the spirit (rewilding) and the healing of the body (resistance). Both are one in the same. Our deepest wound cries for healing. That is a cry for action.

For the nihilists and egoists, resistance comes from the immediate need to destroy what destroys you. Its only construction is in its destruction. I'm not going to say that is always a bad thing. But I

will say this: I have no question in my being that there is something that I am fighting for, not just something I'm fighting against. It is not about morality or about some lofty New Age crap: it's about something unmediated and present. Something real.

As my ideas of self and other dissolve, I've come to realize that there is life in this world. I know it is interconnected. It comes through the spirit that is never dead, but it is channeled and caged by the domesticators. The end result of ten thousand years of mediation is a body that cannot be buried.

I know this like I know civilization must be destroyed. My spirit knows this. My spirit *feels* this. The spirit of all life knows this.

It has always known this.

And I've only just begun to listen.

2005

# Sticks, Stones, and Nursing Homes

“I wonder what it would feel like to kill mommy.”

This came from the mouth of a four-year-old child. Not something I pulled from the newspaper, but the child of a friend’s friend. He’s just your completely average four-year-old American child. Smiling pictures, piles of toys, and loves fast food. A child I’ve seen off and on since he was born.

And he’s hardly alone.

The same day I heard about that line (which I later found out wasn’t a single thought or bad mood, but an everyday topic), I heard about another friend of a friend’s child. This one is nine years old and had duct taped a butcher knife to his hand and ran around the house trying to slash everyone. His parents hide food and drinks because he shits and pisses in them. Just another otherwise average American kid.

True enough thoughts alone don’t kill. But the line between thought and action is becoming easier to cross. It’s becoming easier to kill. But the issue isn’t about being more psychologically prepared to kill. It’s about being psychologically separated from life and reality.

If these four- and nine-year-olds aren’t convincing, you probably don’t have to look very far for much more of the same. Two years ago, in this area, a sixteen-year-old boy killed his brother with a hammer and went to a school dance. Now he’s a child in an adult prison who is considered hopeless.

If those stories make the local news anymore it can be surprising.

Let's face it, this sort of thing is hardly shocking anymore. Everyone wonders what's wrong with kids these days. Most people have their theories: lack of strong morals, weak education system, or hell bent right wing parents, bleeding heart liberal parents, not enough good ol' fashioned ass whoopin', not enough therapy, lack of attention, too much TV, too spoiled, and so on.

It's become an all too familiar topic and rarely do people have enough time or attention to actually try to change things (short of fits of violence or anger). Opinions, of course, don't always have a lot of real world impact. Unfortunately sedatives do, and they're much easier to come by. But no matter how the problem is or is not dealt with, we all know that there's a problem. But it's always their kids or those kids. We all know how to look the other way.

We all know how miserable modern life can be. Knowing this is a full time job, literally. We can talk about the problems of civilized, highly technological living and safely fall back into the passive nihilism that things aren't going to get better so we just have to make the best of it. We could always improve things for ourselves if we really tried. Or we could win the lottery.

But when we look at ourselves, it can be really easy to just stop thinking about it all. Life's just too short and it's easier to go with the flow. Young adult to middle age, we just deal with what we're given. Let's step outside of that for a moment and think about the other parts of life where we're not just out to get 'what's ours:' being young and being old.

All of us have been young. Many of us will probably be old. As Future obsessed as our rationally defined reality is, it's just as much about eternally living in that mid-range of twenties and thirties. Or at least looking like it. Not many of us look forward to going "over the hill." We spend billions of dollars and thousands of hours to keep ourselves looking young and sexy. We become very high maintenance.

But part of the dream of a better tomorrow is that we'll be there to live it. Happy, healthy, synthetically balanced us. We'll be slaves to the technological future so long as it's to our benefit. We can ignore the consequences of progress and the wonders of chemistry when it gives us stuff. We don't want to die, but we certainly don't want to grow older.

Either way, we're happy to report that modern technology al-

lows us to live longer than ever before. This much may very well be true. More often than not though, a long life is really just a very slow death. Alzheimer's may be less of a physical condition than a psychological escape from the reality that things didn't get better.

In the First World, one of the fastest growing areas of population is the percentage of elderly people: a major selling point for progress. But in a society that changes as quickly as ours, the elderly are quickly outdated. We keep them around for sentimental value and they're stored in tall, cheaply built filing cabinets called nursing homes where they receive the best babying and prolonged misery that money and social security can buy. Or is that tender loving care?

Once upon a time, people lived in egalitarian societies.

There wasn't equality in the sense that we know it, but in the sense that there was no system of rank or worth. People were just people, young, old, or in-between. That can be hard to imagine. Damn hard really.

But for those of us basking in the wonders of Modernity, it's hard because progress and evolution make it unthinkable. We've naturalized hierarchy so much that we can't think of anything without it. An infant is without strength and knowledge; on their own they have no leverage or economic viability. An elderly person has knowledge but less strength and ability. Might makes right and the strong and knowledgeable take control and determine all the rest. Any reality based off of this kind of thinking can't help but apply it everywhere. Our bosses make us feel inferior, our parents establish authority, and we learn to trust experts rather than ourselves.

Somewhere something went horribly wrong.

The complete depravity of modernity is only the most obvious proof of that.

Economies breed economic thinking. We learn what is utilitarian or useful to carrying civilization forward. It's all about efficiency. When our lives are run like machines it should be no wonder that they must start and end that way, from sonograms to oxygen tanks.

All animals are born with a will to survive. Humans are no exception. Most infants will not crawl off a cliff unless everyone is convinced (and has convinced them) that they don't know better. Likewise, a baby isn't likely to cry unless it needs something. That

something is not tough love; it is a cry for attention. This is something most people know, but civilization teaches us differently.

This is something Jean Liedloff learned when she lived among the Yequana and the Sanema, Indigenous societies in the Amazon. Children were always touched and always treated with complete confidence, but were never pampered. They got what they needed without ever being told what to do and parents never expressed anger towards them. Every step children took was of their own will and motivation. She refers to this as instinctual parenting. That is something primal. In the world beyond civilization, her realizations are rather universal. Should it be any surprise that children raised this way never thought about killing their mothers?

But civilized living is anti-primal. Children must be broken and must learn to obey orders from the start or they may never be of use. To become a part of the machine, we must start from birth. We must learn very early the need for efficiency. And what's more efficient than complete standardization?

Liedloff saw that a baby is taken immediately from the womb into the arms of its mother. She's the first thing the child will see. The newborn hears the familiar heartbeat and feels the heat of bodies. She saw births in the hospital where children are taken into sterile hands, measured, weighed, and set alone to learn the most central message of civilization: infinite need. What it eventually gets is a pathetic substitute for being held: bottles of formula, mechanical love, noise, and the loneliness and boredom of the crib. The child cries for distant parents who are eager to ensure their independence and gets more attention from soft fabric than warm skin. The child learns the importance of compromise, of wanting.

Confident and fulfilled children are not efficient machines. Everything must be done to undermine them.

But the psychological pain goes deeper than this. It begins at conception. It takes in the anger, hate, love, and fear of their mother in a world of compromise and the misery of not being efficient enough. We are assured that children are not thinking, even if the religious say that they are full beings crafted by God. They're just lower on the social ladder.

We are told not to listen to the senses. Words are more important. Science can prove it.

With this divine knowledge, we can continue to inflict the original trauma of domestication without consequence. And even bet-

ter, we can take no fault for children with homicidal and suicidal tendencies.

Chemical imbalances: chemical solutions. We breed the killers and they are increasingly efficient.

We stockpile the elderly because they become our badge of success. We hide them because then we don't have to see how miserable life is when you can no longer control your own body. We don't have to think about what it would be like to feel physically numb (we're actually experts at numbing our minds), to have someone help you to the bathroom, to become completely frail, and not be able to do anything about it.

We visit. We bring sedatives. We do our good deed.

We think that will never be us.

Senility becomes a retreat for the elderly left with nothing. The future that they spent their lives building leaves them in a cookie-cutter room and with a TV they often can't see or hear: another pathetic substitute. The original trauma comes full circle.

A life lived for the machine is not a life lived at all. Threats of going to hell for not working or threats of poverty were enough to make someone sell their days rather than live them. When that realization starts to set in and you're left alone to think about it, you can become bitter, sentimental, or your mind can shut down. There's not too much you can do about it at that point and when we can shove that reality away, it's something we don't have to think about either.

The problem with confident children is that they won't allow themselves to be sold. They can live in horribly inefficient ways and they can be happy. They don't need stuff. The purpose of life is something known and enacted rather than an interesting philosophical question. Life is not reduced to a basis for dissecting, measuring, and weighing the world.

Someone raised to be confident and happy doesn't wait for the Future. They won't make that compromise. When they feel their life can no longer be lived to its fullest, they don't fear death. They know that living in fear of death is not living at all. They know that they have lived well. They are ready to move on.

In our wonderful Modernity, suicide is a crime. It cuts a wonderful, mechanically reproduced life short of the bounty of prog-

ress. It's called a pathetic and desperate act. Morality tells us that life is sacred because our bodies are the property of God. Dependent, domesticated people aren't even allowed control over themselves.

But elderly suicide is an act of confidence. It can be faced with openness and can end a life well lived.

By civilized values, this is unthinkable. Death cannot be accepted any more than life can be lived. We can never give up our faith and our blind hope that technology will make us young and vibrant again. We can never give up on the future. When our last days are drawn out by the iron lung, we have nothing but incomplete lives to think about and we aren't able to give up.

As we listen to our heartbeats mechanically reproduced and amplified, all we can do is hope for a miracle. A cybernetic fountain of youth and another day to fight off the reality that we are animals and like all living beings we will one day die.

But this is not the suicide of our Modernity. Everyday suicides are tragic. They are tragic because the passive nihilism of our reality allows only for enough confidence to end to a life not lived, rather than the confidence to refuse compromise and fight. It is the last and boldest act of defeat. And sadly, it is often seen as the only possibility.

Our efficiency is destroying the Earth just as it turns beings into dependents. Our hope for the future relies on ghost resources, of finding more fuel for the machine. We will kill to maintain this civilization rather than ask if its end wouldn't be the best thing for us and for the Earth.

Carrying capacity, human impact analysis, and human ecological footprint, all names for studies that show us this reality is running on finite sources: that maintaining the great escape from death is running the planet dry. We've been warned that the search is running out of fuel and its end is a matter of time. As William Catton pointed out, the inevitable tomorrow was yesterday. We've peaked and the bright future of hope is fading, and quickly. If we have anything to learn about collapse from past civilizations it is that no crash landing is a good one. And most of us won't even notice till it all comes crashing down.

And all of this for a way of existing that cannot be fulfilling. A way of being that always looks to the future and never just is. A way of life that we create, maintain, and reproduce daily.

We have to play dumb when kids talk about killing.

We say they are desensitized.

What they are is efficient.

Most often we look towards technology. That's a search in the right direction, but rarely does it go all the way. TV and video games are efficient ways of keeping kids from thinking. It makes them passive while causing sensory overload and fills in for sensory deprivation. It's a cheap and constant thrill, a fast paced adventure without any involvement.

System overload, system crash.

Children have almost always known how to kill. In hunter-gatherer societies, this is something they start at early. But they learn about the connectivity of life: about the link between us all and the importance of not abusing it.

Zygmunt Bauman writes: "It has been perhaps the unique achievement of modern civilization to enable ordinary folks, 'just good workers,' to contribute to the killing—and to make that killing cleaner, morally antiseptic and efficient as never before." It is true that video games have been a virtual target practice and glamorized killing has numbed children. But these efficient killers are not full of bloodlust. In fact, they have no lust, no passion, no being. They are becoming more mechanical daily.

This is not science and technology gone wrong. This is where progress must go. This is how the future must be. The end product of domestication is efficient dependents. As our technology becomes more advanced and creeps into every bit of life, this is how it looks.

This is the future.

We hide animality and nature from the children. We hide everything that makes us human. We deny touch from birth. We deny confidence.

For millions of years people lived closely and without secrets. Adults would have sex by the fire at night and children knew and accepted it. Sexuality and curiosity were never sins nor outlawed. Children could play and experiment. They could be confident about their bodies and desires.

There was respect: the kind that exists between beings, the kind that comes together for mutual desire and not violent rage. The kind that is cooperative and not competitive.

No might, no right. No rape, murdering rampages, and death came with dignity. Life was lived and there was no compromise.

This is how things were and how they can be.

What separates this reality and ours is the willingness to compromise. A compromise that means our complicity to efficiency and blind faith in the future that is killing our home and our being. A complicity that makes us do unto our children what has been done to us.

Chellis Glendinning wrote that the original trauma is domestication. It creates rage within us, but is given no safe outlet in society. It ends in battered children, relationships based on domination, dead classmates, and children born knowing that they are not wanted.

The reality that we reproduce daily is inflicted upon the planet. And each child that is born is given this burden. Part of ending this cycle of domination and submission means not inflicting that original trauma: it means refusing domestication for ourselves and refusing complacency. Most of all, it means breaking a blind faith in the future. Breaking the morality that denies what our bodies tell us, what the Earth tells us.

It means being confident. It means no compromise. It means passionate love and hate instead of an emotionless, efficient void.

The hallmarks of Modernity and progress are the nursery where babies learn the harsh lessons of civilized life: that nothing comes easily and desires are infinite. It ends in the nursing home where lives of devotion to blind faith drag out our last days and ensure that we never stand on our own. When we are finally ready to do so, we are no longer physically or mentally capable.

We are told that this must be better than where we were: a savage place with only sticks and stones. Where we didn't have a greater purpose in life and children and elderly were killed madly.

We think this as the empire of progress takes over the planet, predators feeding off life so that they may one day live forever. Our fear of death is pathological. It breeds an efficient world without love. It creates morality that says we have no right to end a life that we cannot give the most absolute care for in the world. A choice that carries the promise that no child will exist unless they can be given everything they need to be confident and live fully. Our fears deny us the knowledge that we can end our life when we are satis-

fied and know that things cannot go on forever. We no longer realize that we can leave this world with dignity and pride.

The only thing 6 billion predatory people can do is die slowly and take the planet with them. It was announced recently that the world population would be 9 billion by 2050. The inevitability of the future goes unquestioned. We have faith in our illusion. But our illusion has no reality.

A child recently asked me if I would kill someone if it would save the planet. He is eleven-years-old.

I thought, “if only it was that easy,” but you can never know how an answer like that might be taken anymore.

I’ve thought about that a lot though. I found myself asking if I really care enough that I might leave a newborn child that I could not offer everything they needed to live fully. If I could break the morality, the little God in my head that said all life is God’s property and only they could make that choice.

I was reminded of the supposed glory of progress. Of the long life we’ve been given.

I had to wonder if I loved an elderly person enough to help them die with dignity or if I could leave them behind when they asked for it.

I think of the love these “savage acts” must take. The implicit love of the world and the love of life, seemingly hidden behind what looks like an act of brutality to us.

And I think of the confidence and passion behind those decisions.

The future of progress need not be inevitable.

The original trauma, once confronted, can be challenged. We need not be victims. We can be survivors. We can be active. We can live on our own terms.

But it requires a lot from us. It requires us to stop compromising.

It requires us to stop being efficient.

We’ve seen a glimpse of where this is heading and what the consequences are beyond the daily reality that we can chose to confront or to ignore.

The question I’m left wondering is whether I would destroy the ma-

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chine, that engine and lifeblood of civilization, that is killing, dominating, and subjugating life.

What I've discovered is that I still have a whole lot of very inefficient passion and an unspeakable will to live without compromise.

2005

# Anarchy and Anthropology

Anthropology, like all sciences, is a tool of the civilized.

Radical anthropologist Stanley Diamond has written: “Civilization originates in conquest abroad and repression at home.”<sup>1</sup> The role of science has been to justify and perfect that conquest and repression, and anthropology isn’t an exception. However, through the work of anthropologists (both unintentionally and intentionally) we’ve come to a greater understanding of the human-animal and the anarchistic condition we’ve lived in for over 99% of our existence. We come up against the problem of having to work with such tools of the civilizers while trying to destroy the entire mental and physical system that created it.

## *Outsiders Looking In and Away*

The original anthropologists primarily worked from the accounts of conquistadors, missionaries, and travelers bringing back news of the “savages” beyond the realms of civilization. The two options that the conquerors saw for the “primitives” was to wipe them out or assimilate them, though as we have historically seen, both have led to similar outcomes. The assimilation was spearheaded by missionaries and those who found Indigenous people had more value alive (as labor) than dead, although the two are hardly separable. The hopes of the missionaries would be to pave the way for a “friendly” relationship and to “civilize” the “savages” through their God.

The work of the time would predominately be self-serving

accounts of the rise to civilization through “savagery” and “barbarism.” The major shift would be with Franz Boas who focused on the need for direct fieldwork around the turn of the century. Boas, a German immigrant to the United States, saw the natives of this country being slaughtered off and fast. His concern was that all of this knowledge would die off with these people and began the turn of anthropological work to recording the *entirety* of the knowledge being destroyed.

With Boas came the importance of describing and cataloguing aspects of the society. This kind of approach is the work of the scientist. Despite what good intentions Boas and his followers had, their work was entirely subjective. By describing everything that the observer sees, there is no kind of objectivity. There is only a situation that German philosopher Hans Peter Duerr calls “riding the fence,” meaning that there is a person trying to *understand* one reality to *translate* it to those in another reality. That person then is stuck in the middle, always a part of one culture and is therefore only capable of observing the other culture through their perceptions.

What Duerr points out is that there is no kind of scientific method that can even begin to bring about what it proposes it will.<sup>2</sup> In this case, that is the field of anthropology acting as the study of humans, or as Stanley Diamond says, “the study of men in crisis by men in crisis.”

Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski furthered the process that Boas started a few decades later, after his work with the Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea. Malinowski’s initial fieldwork there ended up lasting longer as he moved onto a remote island to avoid deportation during World War One. Over this period he became immersed in Trobriand culture, defining what he would later call “participant-observation.” Duerr comes to mind as I can see Malinowski the scientist becoming somewhat emerged into this “primitive” society to return to Europe. Knowing his situation wasn’t permanent, he always had a foot out the door in some respects.

I don’t feel this wipes all validity from his work, I just feel that when looking at these cases, these are all things we have to consider. This kind of observation carries with it the scientism of objectivity, believing that the wholeness of a culture can be observed and understood from a point of neutrality. French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has recognized that while science is still myth, it carries the possibility of finding a “factual reality.” He states:

“Science will never give us all the answers. What we can try to do is to increase very slowly the number and the quality of the answers we are able to give, and this, I think, we can do only through science.”<sup>3</sup> Through even this rather liberal assessment we are left with the belief in hard facts rather than interpretations or, more often, shallow snapshots of cultures that are quite often in the flux of colonial impact. While Lévi-Strauss has denied scientism he has nonetheless carried its underpinnings.

All of the positive outcomes of anthropology must also be understood in a way that is independent of civilized assertions. What we have seen from the field of anthropology and understanding the problems we face now is that, in the words of Paul Shepherd, “[f]undamentally we are people of the Pleistocene,” we are hunter-gatherers.<sup>4</sup>

The anarcho-primitivist critique takes this understanding very seriously, meaning that civilization is a recent invention and the effects of domestication are just a sign of our urging to return to the way of life that has shaped our being. With this, there is little reason why we shouldn’t uphold this kind of information, because it speaks directly to the repressed hunter-gatherer in all of us entrenched within civilization. What we should always be wary of is the dry scientism that underlies the specific search that anthropology takes on.

### *Creating Reality*

In his book, *Red Earth, White Lies*, Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr. opens up questions about “the myth of scientific fact.” His drive in this was to debate the well-established theory that Native Americans arrived on this continent by crossing the Bering Strait within the last 20,000 years (one of the more liberally accepted estimates). In the eyes of Deloria and some other Native Americans, this theory, established as fact, is based on a racist dismissal of both native oral traditions and histories. His book documents evidence—including evidence of far older occupation and the existence of usable, ocean baring boats that could have been used for migration outside the land bridge—to counter the narrative that the Bering Strait was the sole means of peopling the Americas, that is simply disregarded by scientists when it doesn’t fit their storyline.

I have concerns about the validity of some arguments that may

be based on land claim issues, which has been an accusation against this particular book. As an anarchist, I feel that nothing makes any specific land someone's property, but this kind of legal assertion against governments is an attempt to reclaim grounding from colonizers. I find that a lot of the arguments are worthy of heavy consideration.

What Deloria draws upon in this book are the ways in which anthropology, as a science, will pick and choose what evidence it will bring into its factual reality. This is a serious problem of all scientific understandings, a conception of a kind of absolute truth that underlies *all* of existence. What happens is that the possibilities for what is fact are framed only within what is known as real for those who are observing. A lot of people have a hard time understanding that science is all just theorizing, in this way it becomes only possible to think of people coming into this continent through the Bering Strait.

I can't say I take the scientific side or the Indigenous side here since neither really exist as a monolithic representation, but I think that reliance upon scientific fact has limited our ability to contextualize the histories and complexities that lead us to these particular points and intersections. It's not that the facts aren't true, but that the picture can so often be incomplete.

The problem, as I see it, isn't in trying to figure out what is right or wrong but realizing that a system that carries such values and can *impose them upon others* is the problem. I have little interest in battling myths with others, and feel that a mythic, ecological consciousness is important to rewilding our lives. I feel that anthropology can be vital in deconstructing the universalized and institutionalized myths that underlie and maintain civilization.

### *Cataloguing Conquest*

The past of archaeology isn't much different than the rest of anthropology. The kind of observation that Malinowski brought into the fieldwork of anthropology could be said to be the basis of archaeological digs. It wasn't till after Darwin's *Descent of Man*, published in 1859, that archaeologists would even recognize the past as existing outside the 6,000-year span that the church allowed since "creation."

In the New World, it wasn't till Boas' criticisms that the way

digs were done was reshaped. Archaeological digs, as we know them now, didn't take their current form till the 1960s through the work of Lewis Binford after the 1947 origin of the Carbon-14 dating technique, explicit use of evolutionary theory, employment of cultural and ecological concepts, and the use of systems theory.

Archaeology is essentially the study of the past through material remains. The work of archaeologists can only really be useful when put into context with how certain remains are used by more recently observed peoples or common usage of similar materials. What archaeology really has to work with is finding the exact location of things in the earth. Their work is to literally dig up the past and theorize on the implications of their findings. In many ways this is working with a huge disadvantage and moving into a lot of speculation, but there is a lot that can be learned from this despite the handicap. Some have taken these findings and added to the critique of civilization, such as John Zerzan, Brian Fagan, and Clive Ponting to name only a few.

What I see as problematic here are the actualities of all of this. While I see no point in discrediting the effects of all the collected information that points to the inherent problems of civilization, I do think there may be a point when this becomes self-serving. I'm not interested in ever saying that we should stop looking, but I'm concerned that this search has overcome the possibilities that are being opened up. When I was writing these thoughts, something was constantly coming into my mind; that we know that civilization is fucked up and that this is not the way of life that humans have become ecologically evolved into, but how much do we have to constantly reassert it before we *do* something about it? I'm not accusing these folks of not trying to do something, but I become concerned in general.

Looking into the fields of anthropology, I constantly see people like Boas who are concerned with constantly *recording* and *cataloguing* all the problems of civilization, even if incidentally. What comes to mind is a photograph from the Vietnam War of three American soldiers raping a Vietnamese woman. The war photographer—as well as the photographer and journalist in general—have made it their work to constantly record the destruction that is occurring, possibly with the hopes that what they have recorded may spur others to action. How much does it take before we stop just recording hoping that someone else will

come along before we *act*?

In many ways the anthropologist is just like that war photographer, watching destruction take place right before their eyes and recording it. Perhaps this is the success of domestication in *disempowering* individuals to feel that they can have no impact on the situation, but my interests remain purely revolutionary. Again I am forced to ask what it will take before we stop being mere observers as our home and all life is being destroyed before we do something about it? I feel anthropology can serve as a weapon against the civilized reality, but I'm afraid that so long as it remains within scientific understanding it will seek to only make us all participant-observers to destruction.

The work of the archaeologists is the business before the bulldozers. This can be a tough situation. Knowing that developers will completely destroy the land without regard, would it be doing something positive to try and pull out the pieces of human past that will be plowed away? Can it serve as a kind of deterrent against developers or is a dig just another method of clearing out the land, whether developers follow or not? Most importantly, I'm concerned with finding a way of trying to stop the destruction from the start, and not trying to make the best of a shitty situation.

### *Revolutionary Potential*

The work of radical anthropologists like Pierre Clastres, Marshall Sahlins, Richard B. Lee, and Stanley Diamond is vital to moving anarchist critique and action. What is being uncovered by anthropology is too valuable to be discarded, and it is inspiring to see people from within these fields realizing the potential influence of their work.

However, it is equally important to use that evidence as more than just findings and intellectual curiosities. To move beyond civilization we will need to use this kind of knowledge to reawaken the wildness that sleeps within us. Anthropology will remain vital only so long as it speaks to us and we are able to *use* it without *becoming* it.

The same applies to history and other social sciences. I personally feel that the work of the evolutionary theorists was vital to overthrow the scientific mythology of the religious conquerors. However, as a rewilding human, I'm forced to question the potential

of these findings too. To what degree is it important that we know the specifics of our entire past? What is important is a mythological, anti-institutionalized consciousness that enhances who we are within the context of the community of life that we are a part of. The success of civilization exists in reducing our reality to a backdrop of things that we exist *apart from*.

That also implies a lot of responsibility. The limitations that might exist from all of the cataloguing and recording become necessary to know since we become the products and embodiments of a history that we really know so little of.

It's a complicated reality.

What I'm referring to above isn't a kind of intentional ignorance or turning the cheek on knowledge, but to question what is a part of the human-animal. From my own understanding, a mythic, unwritten view is one that is able to flow with the world and can achieve what we'd hope to get from history and science without subjective implications on the world that we are theorizing about. The problem that is being opened here is getting to there from here. I'm interested in a reawakening of primal consciousness that has been repressed by civilized domestication in order to justify and continue conquest and exploitation. We are constantly up against questions of how can we use these things that shape the civilized reality in order to destroy it. Towards this I can only point to what I think is problematic, in this case being any kind of complete faith in sciences like anthropology and using what speaks to my being without disregarding what I just don't care for.

The point in extending on this discussion is to find a way of using these kinds of findings without using the system that has produced them. I feel that a revolt against civilization will require a revolt against the scientism of civilization. The path to anarchy will require calling into question all of the sacred cows that have paved the path for rational dissent so that we can return to our primal being.

2003

#### *Endnotes*

1. Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, New Brunswick: Transaction, 1987, pg. 1.

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2. Hans Peter Duerr, *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary between Wilderness and Civilization*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1985.
3. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*, New York: Schocken, 1995, pg. 14.
4. Paul Shepard, *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*, Athens: Georgia UP, 1998, pg. 36.

# Eternal Frontier, Eternal War

As I write this, people are being killed systematically. As you read this, people are being killed systematically. Bodies, lives, and beings; torn to shreds by bombs, bullets, napalm, and flame: not just killing, but maiming, uprooting, and devastating lives. Devastating life.

Right now that killing is going on in Iraq. The people being killed are children, parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, friends, and lovers. We see numbers. That is if we see anything at all. What people in Iraq see are bodies without limbs, people broken mentally and physically.

There is a movement to end the occupation of Iraq. People want an end to wars. They march, hold signs, protest, get beaten and arrested, and occasionally attack the war machine symbolically.

But the end to war will not come. The end of war cannot come. Wars may end, but not war.

For the most part, protestors can accept this. That is why they fight against wars. They are brutal and nasty. Most people know someone involved. They tie ribbons around trees. Though, somehow I doubt the trees care much about soldiers. But wars can and will end. Things can go back to normal for those not on the receiving end of the bombs.

Stop the wars and its back to business as usual. Back to everyday warfare.

Civilization is warfare.

This is not a rhetorical statement.

Civilization is the culture of cities. Cities are permanent settlements with a lot of people on a little amount of land. All those people on that little amount of land need “resources.” And those have to come from somewhere. The countryside is the other half of cities. They are one in the same and they need each other.

This has always been the case. This will always be the case, if not locally, then globally. Rows of cash crops and mines on one end: rows of houses and people on the other. The people in cities will take what they need to survive. They must because a city cannot support itself and the countryside must grow with it. Almost always this taking requires force.

This is what Stanley Diamond was thinking about when he wrote: “Civilization originates in conquest abroad and repression at home.”<sup>1</sup> Where people cannot be coerced into giving on their own, there are armies and police to ensure that things run smoothly. Between states this is called war. But states do the same thing everyday to their citizens. It is still war, but we can’t call it that. The State can’t afford for us to call it that.

At the root of the problem, there are two things that happened to set all of this in motion: gardens and settlements. Both of which are usually tied, but not always. But the garden and the settlement represent two different aspects of war. They represent ecological reasons and political reasons for war, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

Gardening is about taming wildness. Pulling weeds, clearing forest land, and selective breeding are all methods of domesticating. This is as true for small-scale horticulturalists as it is for industrial agriculturalists.

The damage that can be done depends on the relationships of the people to the land and the scale. Small-scale horticulturalists typically see the earth as their home and have longer fallow periods and shifting gardens to make sure they don’t destroy it. Industrial agriculturalists see the earth as something dead and use science to fix it. Naturally, if they see the earth as dead matter, they have no real issue with killing it as they do.

Bioregions are picky. The healthiest ecosystem is a wild one, but a balanced ecosystem can take some sway. Horticultural societies can exist without tipping the scales. Occasionally those scales do tip and something must be done to bring things back in balance. That can take days or years. Even if it takes over 6,000 years (as in our

case), it is something that must happen. The far end of that balance is what is called carrying capacity. It means simply how much life can be supported by any particular bioregion.<sup>3</sup>

Gardens challenge carrying capacity because people settle around them. Being nomadic has shaped who we are as humans. This has defined our ecological role. As nomadic hunter-gatherers, there are any number of ways to keep us within carrying capacity that are just inherent to that way of being. When people settle down, populations increase. Population increases, more food needs to be grown. More food needs to be grown; more land must be cleared and used. When other people are using that land, there will be violence.

This is the formula for “primitive warfare.”

This kind of warfare serves a number of ecological purposes. For the most part it is largely symbolic. It is typically spaced at least ten years apart and has a minimum amount of casualties. In some ways, it has been considered a kind of play. It is easy to see why when you see the novelty size arrows shot high into the air or that the bulk of fighting is really shouting insults, which both sides may laugh at.<sup>4</sup>

But it is still warfare.

It is not unheard of for whole bands to be wiped out in raids or battle. This kind of warfare happens between people who know each other intimately. It is an accepted part of life. But it serves the ecological purpose of not tipping the ecological balance.

Warfare happens in time of ecological stress.<sup>5</sup> People do die in raids and battle, but that is not the most effective way of keeping numbers down. In these societies, being a warrior is extremely important. Gender becomes an important distinction and raising strong boys takes priority. Having warrior sons becomes important. The response is female infanticide. The result of having far less women than men is there are fewer children in the end.<sup>6</sup>

This is not what must happen, but this is what has happened over and over again. If you live a way that challenges carrying capacity, there must be some way of keeping the balance. Warfare and the values that come with it have been that solution for horticultural societies in almost every instance.

But this is not what has always happened. If it were, we wouldn’t be in our current dilemma. If it were, civilization would have never existed. We would never have to destroy it.

The problem is that not all societies went through a horticultural stage. The old lists of supposed social evolution are something that our linear, historical orientation needs, not something that necessarily happened or must happen. The societies that originated civilization typically skipped the horticultural step or barely went through it. They were settled people who technically lived by gathering and hunting. They cultivated fields and fields of wild grains.

Domestication came later, but they became settled and dependent upon stored grains first.

Politics can be created in two ways. One is typical of horticultural societies, like the ones mentioned above. When the population does expand and people stick together rather than break apart and create new bands, there tends to be people who have more influence. These people are called Big Men (they are not always men, but most often are).

Big Men talk. A lot. They rant about everything in the morning or the evening. They have an opinion and must voice it. For the most part, people don't even notice. Lying in hammocks or around the fire, they can hear the rants. Sometimes they go listen, but not all the time. This ranting is important though. That is what a Big Man must do. They are typically no different than other people, but they gain notoriety because of their ability to convince and typically they are able to pull together more stuff for massive feasts or general redistribution.

The Big Man rants and the people tolerate it. Occasionally they listen to him. Occasionally he's talking about raiding or attacking a neighboring village. Sometimes he can convince a number of people to get involved, but their decisions are always voluntary.

The Big Man has no power, no authority, and no ability to coerce. He only has his voice. Nothing exists for him to hoard so much that he can control or attempt to control the actions of others. His position is far from permanent and a lack of a Big Man never hurt anybody.

They can wage wars, but only if other people are willing to go along with it.

That usually works for a raid or battle, maybe two. But if people had the choice to go to war constantly, they would choose not to. That has almost always been the case. There are no specialists. There

are no armies: bands of people specialized in the art of taking lives.  
Sometimes war just happens.

The other way power is created is through surplus. Some horticultural societies expand and some become empires. In these societies, chiefs or kings hold power. The role of a chief can be slightly different than the role of a Big Man, but it can also be slightly different than the role of a king. A chief must be a good talker, but he has more than a voice. He has a surplus.

A chief and occasionally a Big Man will have multiple wives. What this means is that he has a number of gardens and a number of people working them. A single garden can feed the family that works it with relative ease, but there are times when they need more or crops fail. The chief, with a number of gardens, can compensate them. In fact, they must. This is where coercive power comes from: the perception of dependency.

The chief gives and talks. The people listen so long as the chief provides something for them and tells them what they want to hear. The power of a chief is not absolute. The position can be terminated. But the position does carry some power. They are called in to settle disputes between people and in the process become the first true political institution. Politics are created here.

In return for these services, people will listen to them. The most authority they can possess is in times of war. Their voice has more sway in this time than a Big Man for two reasons: they already have an upper hand in the society and they are known for their prowess in battle.<sup>7</sup>

Through all of these, the power of a chief is created and affirmed. They cannot force anyone into battle, but their decision becomes a political one and there can be consequences.

Civilization is really born in war. That is the essence of the State, of kingdoms, of empires.

The influence or power of a Big Man or some chiefs was never absolute, but absolute power is the basis for kings and some more powerful chiefs. So, how did this happen?

In the societies mentioned above, as long as the chief or Big Man had something to offer or was reasonable, people might listen to them. The only time this was ever truly exercised was during battle or war where some leadership is necessary. But as populations continue to grow and devour the earth and its relations surrounding

them. War becomes not an occasional ordeal, but a part of everyday life.

The origins of absolute power could only be created through fear. People don't compromise their autonomy unless they must or they are convinced that they must. The need for land puts people on the offense. The knowledge that others may be in the same situation puts people on the defense. The role of those in power has always been to play up these two aspects. Society must be under attack. Society must be defended.<sup>8</sup>

Under these premises people will be willing to compromise. Under these premises states, nations, and empires are created. The earth is attacked. People are attacked. Lives are destroyed.

This should start sounding familiar.

Eternal war is as tied to civilization as the need for the eternal frontier. There must be room for growth. There must be resources. There must be people willing to throw their lives away to defend the "greater good."

States grow and roles become more and more specialized. Police can be trained and soldiers can be conscripted. People can dedicate their lives to advancing technology. The art of killing and maiming becomes increasingly efficient.

This is how civilization must be.

The only thing that's changed over the last 10,000 years is the scale and efficiency of tools meant to do nothing but destroy. This is our heritage, reaffirmed daily. We remain distanced and entertained. But this is the true cost of our way of being.

No one really likes war. At least no one involved in the actual fighting; the actual destruction of life.

The very word can turn your insides. As long as we are entertained and distant spectators, we are fine. Pictures are posted of civilian casualties and people will react. They will react just enough to believe that their hands are morally kept clean.

Lately, we've been hearing the word quagmire used in terms of the Iraq War. It's a flashback to the Vietnam War that we're stuck in a completely undesirable situation, but one that must be dealt with. Whether we support the war or not it is still going on. That is the reality that has been created for us and we are told to deal with it.

It's a depressing thought. No amount of good intentions or hope will bring back lives cut short, lives torn apart, or mend the very flesh of the earth: our home.

But this is our world. This is where we are.

This is a reality that we should never have to deal with. The power to destroy lives across the planet just by trying to survive is something that was never meant to exist. But it does.

Civilization should never have existed. Lives should have never been wasted serving rather than living. Our home should never be threatened.

Perhaps quagmire is the most appropriate word, not only for the war in Iraq, but for our entire way of life. We should have never been in this situation; we should never have to destroy civilization so that we may one day live free. So that life may exist on this planet after we are gone. But we are in this situation and it is in our hands to do something about it.

Civilization is warfare. Like civilization, warfare has an origin. Like civilization, warfare will have an end. It will die with the system that creates and requires it.

Civilization can be destroyed and if we truly want an end to war, it's time to pull the plug.

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# The Witch and the Wildness

The mainstay of our global civilization is the energy that flows through the power outlets in our walls. The fact that our global civilization exists is primarily because we keep plugging in. So why do it? When we turn on a light switch do we think about leaks in nuclear power plants, mountains stripped of their peaks with nothing but steel tracks and dead canaries left inside, do we think about 6 million birds who die yearly in the U.S. alone because they flew into towers high above the tree lines, do we think about the wildness that constantly tries to seep through cracks in the concrete? Do we think about the wildness within us that turns into boiling rage because we compromise life for survival? Of course not, because if we did, we would be out there bashing everything that stands in the way of autonomy.

Spiritually speaking, we are dead.

Domestication is the destruction of the soul. It takes a wild being and reduces it into a piece of the global machinery: we become a part of the machine, mentally and physically. It is no easy process, but it is one we are all familiar with. A process we all feel with deep agony when we say thanks for being handed a paycheck. But in the eyes of the civilizers, it is a necessary process. It's necessary because we aren't born thinking that power is necessary or justified anymore now than we did ten thousand or a million years ago. We have to be tricked into believing in it.

The key to holding power is a good justification.

A good justification doesn't need to be true; it just needs to be believable. This is as true for chiefs on the Trobriand Islands as it is

for Bush Jr. The best reason for having standing armies then seems to be the age-old fear of “barbarians at the gate;” the fear of the chaos and wildness that lurks just beyond the walls, borders, fences, or clearing. Bush Junior’s terrorists are really just filling the slot of the other. For McCarthy and Reagan it was communists. Nazis had Jews, colonialists had savages, and as Clyde Kluckhohn writes, the Navaho, like so many other (stateless and statist) societies had witches.<sup>1</sup>

The antagonistic split between the self and the other then lies at the heart of domestication. To defend territory or to turn a wild plant or animal into your property requires that you not only see it as different, but inferior.<sup>2</sup> This isn’t to say that Indigenous peoples don’t recognize that they aren’t plants or animals, but the relationship with the other isn’t antagonistic or necessarily important: that comes only with domestication.

James Woodburn made the important observation that societies can be split into two primary groups: based either on immediate or delayed return/gratification.<sup>3</sup> Put simply, there are egalitarian societies (meaning all people have equal access to necessities) and non-egalitarian societies (where there is a ranked system of access) respectively. In immediate-return societies, there are no barriers to getting what you need when you need it. There is no mediating system and all people have the skills necessary to meet their needs.

This is more than economics; it is about a way of living that is a constant reminder of the community of life. The separation with the other is contextual: humans are a part of life, not aside from it. There are neither barbarians nor gates; wildness is not feared, but relished. That these societies lack a belief in witchcraft should hardly be surprising, but is widely noted.<sup>4</sup> As Colin Turnbull noticed among the BaMbuti that they “roam the forest at will, in small isolated bands or hunting groups. They have no fear, because for them there is no danger. For them there is little hardship, so they have no need for belief in evil spirits.”<sup>5</sup> But the absence of witches is not only lack of imagination. It is not uncommon for immediate return hunter-gatherers to acknowledge witchcraft among sedentary neighbors, but they take no part in it themselves.<sup>6</sup>

Delayed return societies are a different story. The loss of egalitarianism is directly linked to three primary factors: surplus, sedentism, and domestication. Some societies have one of these, while others may have all three. These can be settled hunter-

gatherers, but in the case of all three, they are typically horticultural societies. However insignificant any of these things may seem to be, they are all very important. When a society becomes dependent on surplus, it is no longer an option for people to just take freely, because, for the first time, something is produced. The fruits of labor are pooled together and positions emerge for people to distribute food. This is where positions of power arise: in small steps, access to life is removed from our hands—something so ingrained in our own lives that the thought of being truly self-sufficient can be shocking.

Sedentism, or the settling of societies, not only counter the anti-power tendencies of mobility and flexibility, but also challenge the ecological relationship formed over millions of years.<sup>7</sup> The “contraceptive on the hip” has been a powerful way of keeping populations within their carrying capacity. But when people settle down, it becomes easier to raise multiple children at one time. This settling further allows for more elaborate domestic situations. Domestication, in its literal sense—accustomed to the household—becomes an issue. The erosion of egalitarian relations begins to be seen in village life and camp layout.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, domestication of plants and animals solidifies the superiority of the self/other split, not only between humans and non-humans, but between “tribes” and kin.

The picture here is the emergence of power and its degradation of egalitarianism. This is the context where witches, sorcerers, and things that go bump in the night emerge. Just as misery loves company, power mongers need a common enemy. The role of a chief is more fragile than the role of a king or president. While strict taboos can arise in their benefit, they are still accessible. When a king or president loses their credibility, they still have access to power. And in our case, ludicrously high paid public relations experts. When a chief loses their credibility, they are often killed or exiled. So a scapegoat is needed. We have terrorists: many others have witches.

The looming threats ensure that domestication breeds dependency.

A bad growing season, drought, or plight can mean starvation to agriculturalists whereas hunter-gatherer mobility means they have to carry on and look for food elsewhere. For many agricultural

States, droughts and floods have meant collapse.<sup>9</sup> In others, they have meant that witches and sorcerers are to blame. Not only are bad harvests and hunts at stake, but personal failures, ill health, and most often, death, are all caused by witches.

For agricultural societies, witchcraft is a common plight. Among the Azande, it's recognized that the witches are always active, but they only become a problem when a person falls victim to witching. That doesn't mean people aren't always cautious, especially because a witch may not know they have bewitched you. As we stock up on canned foods and seal our windows with plastic and tape in preparation for some kind of fallout, we bear many similarities to those fearing witches while they bury and secure possessions, excrement, nail clippings, hair, and so on, all so they don't become tools of the witches trade.

Witchcraft accusations can become a regular occurrence. Most often, a guilty witch can repay the damage of their malign substances without being killed, but this isn't always the case. Needless to say, members of the princely class are very rarely accused of being witches, at least publicly.<sup>10</sup> So do witches become a catchall category for disorder? In many ways, apparently so, but it's easy to see why. When things start to fall apart, it's always more beneficial for those with power to keep people looking everywhere but the social system. Of all people, we should be rather familiar with this.

The witch, then, is the threat of decay and opposition to the social order.

Among the Lele, sorcerers "turn their back on their own kind and run with the hunted, fight against the hunters, work against diviners to achieve death instead of healing."<sup>11</sup> Again, this should sound familiar. "Wild men" and other mythical, wild beasts have long haunted civilized societies, lurking in the forests outside of the empire and creeping in at night.<sup>12</sup> They steal or eat our children and souls, they threaten to carry us beyond the barriers between civilization and savagery and destroy us—turn us loose or kill us, the former seemingly being the more frightening to most.

Despite this, witches are not always used only to justify or strengthen power. The role of witchcraft is typically relative to the amount of egalitarianism that remains within a society. However, increased stress can always make it more dominant. European influence meant a surge in witchcraft accusations for the Yanomami<sup>13</sup> and the Navaho,<sup>14</sup> as it likely has for others. But among

stateless societies, witchcraft accusations are used against further centralization of power.

Most often, the witch in stateless, non-chiefdom societies takes the role of the trickster. It passes on justification for taboo and lays out social etiquette by exemplifying what is socially destructive behavior. Witches break taboo and take on the character of a poor neighbor embodying such qualities as: “unsociability, isolation, stinginess, unfriendliness, and moroseness.”<sup>15</sup> Among the Navaho, witches primarily take part in “all secret and malevolent activities against the health, property and lives of fellow tribesmen.”<sup>16</sup> While at the same time offering a means of expressing these thoughts and behaviors.<sup>17</sup>

The witch or trickster role becomes an important aspect of social cohesion—something to keep in mind when thinking about anti-authoritarian social organization as well. As a society becomes more dependent upon a division of labor and predictable circumstances, it is vital that the health of the State is seen as the health of the individual. Even as a microcosm, nationalism is the lifeblood of forced societies. Keeping the perception of social stratification to a minimum is an important task, one where witch accusations can come in handy.

In these societies, witch accusations can be a means of social leveling. When people become more and more powerful at the expense of others, social unrest shoots up. As Kluckhohn noticed among the Navaho: “the threat of an accusation of witchcraft acts as a brake upon the power and influence of ceremonial practitioners” to keep “their capacity for influencing the course of events supernatural techniques must be used only to accomplish socially desirable ends.”<sup>18</sup> In keeping with the “anarchistic tendencies of Navaho society,” the rise to power is extinguished early.<sup>19</sup>

This usage can be further seen among Shawnee nativists, who, during their revolt against Christianity and colonization in the 1750-70s, would accuse the rich and powerful of being witches.<sup>20</sup>

Although we can clearly draw similarities between accusations of witches among the Navaho and the Azande and terrorists in the age of globalization, it is important to look at witches in our own “his-story.” It has often been easy for Social Darwinists and apologists for progress to point towards fear of witches as reasons why “primitives” were supposedly less evolved or childish and in need of civilizing, often in the form of a rain of bullets or reign of

colonization. But a look into our own closet shows the European Witch-craze taking place within the birth of our beloved scientific rationality from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In America, the Salem Witch Trials stand strong in historical memory, but the 25 lives burned at the stake are little compared to other cases. Back in Europe, at the Diocese of Como, 1,000 witches were burnt in 1523, 1585 left two villages reduced to one female inhabitant each, 1581-1591 saw 900 witches burnt in Lorraine.<sup>21</sup> The list goes on and on. Burnt remains are the legacy of fear.

The witch became a symptom of disorder. And wildness was never so feared. Only now the disorder becomes materialized as a more tangible target.

As patriarchy became even more enmeshed in civilization, enemies became more obvious. For the first time, the witch became gendered and classed. The social deviants were the dispossessed, those whose very existence served as a constant reminder of the frailty of power. During this period, those being burnt were most likely women, the poor, homosexuals and radicals.<sup>22</sup> As women were further subjugated and increasingly seen as relics of nature, they would rise to 82% of supposed witches between 1562 and 1684.<sup>23</sup>

This period was a time of increasing unrest. As social stratification soared to new levels, totalistic disempowerment was hardly an abstract concept. The very backs it was built upon were threatening the established order. Marvin Harris writes: “The principle result of the witch-hunt system (aside from charred bodies) was that the poor came to believe that they were being victimized by witches and devils instead of princes and popes.”<sup>24</sup>

Burnt bodies gave validity to the state. Social ills had a source and, most importantly, the State was doing something about it.

Today whites fear non-whites because they are a tangible threat. Our chances of being killed in a car wreck make the chances of being killed by terrorists (Bush’s “evil people,” not governments of course) look ridiculous. Someone is more likely to die by having a vending machine fall on them than be attacked by sharks. But what are we afraid of? Anything *but* the entire system; the whole of civilization that stands before us daily, the anxiety of a machine paced world, the nagging urges to resist domestication, the radio waves that pierce our bodies in the lurking wildness. The wealth

of production is our health: that is the message domestication puts into our minds.

That is our burden, our crutch.

Wildness, disorder, chaos, and anarchy: these are the witches of civilization.

But the message here is not only a problem, but also an option.

By drawing from the Navaho heritage we can turn towards the persecuted witches during the Christian ritual purifications and take the cue that is being offered. Among the Navaho, Azande, Lele, Europe, and so on, when times got hard, where does one turn? If all your life, you hear of this power that lurks and exceeds the human body, why wouldn't you try to use it? We know that this is what many did during the European Witchcraze and there seems little reason to doubt things were much different among "primitives."

When the patriarchs of Puritanism began to preach of the evils of the lurking wildness of witches and beings that stride the fence between civilization and savagery, the dispossessed sought this out. In searching for a way out, they identified with the antithesis of state power. This is what we have to learn. In seeking to eliminate the threats of the State, those in power show their weaknesses. They unwittingly show what has always lain before us: underneath the veneer of absolute power lies a frail and fragile corpse maintained by the sweat and blood of those who are trained to see through *its eyes*: the vision of domestication.

Civilization becomes us; chains on the mind, scars on the body, piles of charred corpses, the yearning of an enslaved animal to smash the barrier between it and true freedom. The witches, shamans, and sorcerers brought themselves to the brink of death to remind themselves of the frailty of life and the joys of being. Drug-induced trances were temporary breaks from the pain of survival sickness. They sought bewilderment, having "surrendered their individuality, renounced personal volition to the will-of-the-land, and merged individuated desire within the expansive needs of the wild."<sup>25</sup>

This isn't to say that delving into New Age programs, drug-induced escapes, or forcing rewilding will break our domestication; this is actually far from my point. Rewilding is a process and active resistance is a necessary part of that. What I am saying is that the key to the destruction of civilization lies in understanding its witches,

its fears. Not only looking at the external system, but domestication itself, the internalized system: the cop, missionary, politician, economist, and worker in our heads. When we look within and outside, the target before us becomes most apparent. It becomes possible to see that the plug can be pulled on this technological civilization and it will all come crashing down before us. If only we would listen.

The witch is wildness.

The witch is very much alive for the witch is life itself. It smashes machines at work. It burns construction equipment under the cover of night. It stirs within us and it seeks to overtake us if only we would let it.

The civilizers fear this wildness. They lock it up. They paint it as a brutish beast that would go on a violent rampage if released. They push it into our heads. They stand strong with an iron fist, but they are weak. They know they are weak. They know, in time, the wildness will eat their monuments and swallow their pride. The witch runs rampant.

And when the lights go out, beyond the reach of the State, beyond the dependency, beyond the imposed system, we will be free to let the witching substance, the wildness, become us.

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# Open Cages and Closed Minds: Veganism as Ultra-Domestication

There are no animals that choose a diet for ethical or moral reasons. That is, there are no wild animals that chose a diet for ethical or moral reasons.

That's not to say that other animals are just savage, self-gratifying and bloodthirsty beasts: you'll have a hard time finding anything like that in the non-spectacularized wild. On the contrary, ethics are as unthinkable as they are useless in the wild. The reason is simple: you don't shit in the bed you sleep in. You can apply that ecologically, psychologically, scientifically, and, as I want to emphasize, spiritually, but, again, you'll be hard-pressed to find any of those distinctions among wildness either. What you do find is a cyclical and flowing wholeness: not in some spoken or otherwise mediated sense, but in the lived sense.

This can get a little tough here. Wildness is a hard concept for us to comprehend and even harder for us to embody. Everything about wildness runs against the way we live and think as domesticated beings. That is, as civilized beings. Domestication, the process of taming wildness to the domesticity of village, city, and country life, is what makes civilization possible. That is as true for the first hunter-gatherer societies who settled into villages as it is for the first domesticators of cultivated wild grains and herder of animals as it is for each and every one of us.

Like all living beings: we are born wild. Even more to the point,

we are born into wildness. In wildness, all things are connected in a figurative and literal sense. Here decay fertilizes, birth is inseparable from death, there are no boundaries, and purpose is lived through the moment. There is no Future and there is no need for distant or looming gods. This is the world that all beings are born to be a part of, humans included.

Our situation has changed, but not our reality. The reality of wildness is still there and it forever refuses to end. How we see the world around us has changed, though our minds and bodies have not. Sioux poet and resistor John Trudell put it best when he said that the being part of our spirit has been mined. That mining process, the domestication process itself, flips the world entirely upside down: wildness is circular and flowing, the domesticated world is linear, planned, and ordered, wildness encourages self-discovery and the domesticators have created criteria and meticulously crafted programs of required learning. Most importantly, wild beings are an integral part of wildness while domesticated beings are slashed down to an isolated core, which will only ever be a fragment of the Megamachine.

This is the basis for both our physical and mental reality: a fragmented, hierarchical, and highly categorized world. Domestication splits the self from the Other and turns life into a battle for survival. It's no mystery why TV shows about wild animals focus on the predator and the prey, fight for mates and reproduction. Our own reality of consumption, mating, spawning, and dying becomes naturalized.

I want to emphasize that domestication is a process and not an event. Wildness can simply never be fully tamed. Our need for something, for the comfort of community and that lived purpose, must be constantly diverted or filled with more meaningless garbage to keep us from realizing it. The domesticators need flashy technology, credit card debt, sedatives, and pop psychology to keep us from looking at what is really missing in our own lives. We need distractions because that lurking emptiness will only ever end when the wildness begins to flow back in. When we return to the world we were born into.

Rewilding, the process of undomestication, is no easy thing. There are, of course, the physical barriers, but it is the mental barriers that may be the hardest to overcome. Our isolated nothingness

is a far cry from the world of wildness that we are trained to fear. Getting there never will be easy. But we all start somewhere.

I'm stepping ahead of myself a bit here.

Like every other domesticated being, I have always been reaching. Out of sheer desperation, I've grasped onto things that felt like they might bring that needed fulfillment, like it might be the antidote to that lurking emptiness. In hindsight, I see these as partial steps, though often necessary. What they lacked in a spiritual fulfillment they made up for in action. The one that I'm concerned with here is veganism.

For me, veganism has turned out to be one of many steps I've taken and without regret. But my concern, which isn't unique to veganism at all, is about how those half-steps can so easily become the full picture. While full of good intentions and often positive action, they aren't a challenge to the entire unjust system which produces them: civilization. Instead they become a rigid morality that not only doesn't challenge that domesticated worldview, but also completely flows from it and reinforces it. I'm referring to veganism here as a bit of a catch all for animal rights ideology. I want to emphasize that my problem is not with people who eat a vegan diet or all vegan individuals, but with the ideology that is more ultra-domestication than it is anti-domestication.

Knowing the kinds of reactions I'm likely to get for this, let me repeat this point: *this is about vegan and animal rights ideologies, morality, and so on. Not all people who eat a vegan diet fall under this category, but either way, I'm interested with ideas and not every single individual!*

I'm concerned with veganism as one of many impediments to wildness and as one of many fronts for civilization. What I'm concerned with, ultimately, is veganism as a force for domestication that open cages but never breaks the bond with the reality that it seeks to oppose.

#### *Having Your Principle and Eating it too*

There are fine points that separate ideology and morality, but in effect they are pretty indistinguishable. Both of them offer a complete worldview that a person may take part in or that they must abide by, respectively. An ideologue may have a long and elaborate set of defenses for what has happened, what must happen, and how you

must act while a moralist will just tell you what is right and wrong. You can have one or both or any combination, but a prescribed (that is taught, not experienced) worldview needs something to serve as a basis for justification.

Like any domesticating worldview, veganism can be either ideological or moral. What is important is that either way, there is an unshakeable foundation for all ensuing belief, action, and judgment. There is a right and a wrong way, which must always be applied. It is universal. I want to emphasize this last point because the idea of something being applicable always and forever and under any circumstance may be the cornerstone of civilization, and most definitely our global civilization. It is the peak of an ordered worldview. It is anti-adaptive in nature and runs against the flow that keeps wildness wild.

What I'm interested in here is that both ideology and morality make it possible to say something like "the killing of and/or consumption of animals is *always* wrong." No matter what, this must be seen as an unshakeable principle. There's a lot of ways that you can get there, but in the end this unshakeable principle becomes a blinder. Put simply: it puts limits on both your action and your thinking.

In the end, this principle is the final word. Stubbornness and a little bit of tricky wording can back up what it lacks in common sense.

How so? You might be asking. Let's take a look.

A vegan is a person who does not consume or use any animal product or by-product. They do so ostensibly because they are convinced that the killing of and/or consumption of animals is unethical or immoral or just plain wrong. That's easy enough to understand right? Well understanding isn't the problem, application is. Veganism is a lifestyle issue, a set of choices based on the aforementioned principle about what someone will buy, eat, use, dumpster, steal, or whatever. Its appeal is that it is a daily kind of protest or righteousness (depending on where your principle is rooted) against a system that enslaves and slaughters millions of animals daily for food, entertainment, clothing, and the like. Not many people really want to take part in an omnicidal system, so this is an alternative based on things you would do anyway, like shop...

Veganism is applicable in the here and now. Even better, we are told it is a statement. That statement can be amplified by buying

products that are “cruelty-free” or with the vegan symbol of approval. Here’s where things get tricky. We buy these things because they contain no animal products or by-products and are not animal tested. Here’s the kicker: at least, not *directly* contributing to the death and enslavement of animals.

So here’s the one big problem: you consume because you live in civilization, which requires the mass production of everything. By taking part in the system of consumption, you are still involved in the system of production and distribution, which means that soy beans and wheat are grown in fields that were once forests where wild animals once lived and are either fertilized by animal shit from mass produced and enslaved animals or chemicals that kill just about everything which is transported through roads made of uprooted, crushed, and processed stone and rock transported by vehicles of synthetic and horribly toxic plastics along with “natural resources” that are processed to leave out even more toxins to help in the construction and movement of these vehicles which are taken on roads and highways which cut through wild lands and crush wild animals while they try to live out their lives as trucks go to stores, again being concrete and steel over once wild areas, where they are bought with money you get from taking part in the economy which is the core of the one and only omnicultural system to exist on the earth. Not quite so simple, but here’s my point: if you live off of an omnicultural system, then you are a part of it.

That is a point that I can recognize. I can accept it as our reality, but not as the reality that must be. I know that no consumption will address that problem and that whatever choices I make at the market are not going to stop that system. At the same time, it doesn’t mean what I do doesn’t matter, but it means that change has to come from somewhere else. I can accept that trying to destroy civilization requires what would otherwise be considered hypocrisy. But that’s because I have no morality or ideology or platform for how things must be and how I must act.

Veganism, being rooted in personal choices, isn’t so fortunate. So what does the moralist or ideologue do when pushed in a corner? Since their principle is closed and universal, they can either further simplify the application of their principles to the beloved isolated individual of our civilization or they can just get angry. Or a bit of both as things so often go.

The first choice is where we get “directly” from. The world is

simply too big, you just have to do what you can while things work themselves out or the master plan while a peaceful vegan world is under way. Here you'll get to hear things like: "the world is a messed up place, but at least I didn't put the bolt gun to the cows head." Or, "at least I didn't pay the person directly for doing it." Inevitably taking no account for the distribution and transportation of the killed animals is beyond the scope of ethics or morality.

The second choice is, in effect, a blinder. Granted we all get angry, and for perfectly good reasons, but to do so because there are flaws in your ideology and morality are pretty weak ones. But it does happen to the best of us doesn't it?

So this is how a blinder works and we'll definitely be running back into this again. So let's look at how it is rooted and then to how it works out and ultimately what it overlooks.

### *Blinded by the Hype*

The vegan principle that killing animals directly is always wrong is typically based on a number of different perspectives. I'd say that the main three would be that it is just wrong to kill animals (this includes the topic of sentiency, which deserves its own section), that meat is unnecessary for humans (which also includes health issues), and that the industry is inhumane. Like most vegans, I incorporated a bit of all three.

The idea that animal products are unnecessary for humans is just plain wrong. That is, it isn't true for wild humans. It is possible to be a relatively healthy vegan in modern society, just as it is possible to get tomatoes all year round and that tofu can be found in far more places than soy would ever be found. You can take artificial supplements, though this often leads to an imbalance of other nutrients. It is possible to do all of these things, but this comes back to that system and the artificial life that it requires and maintains.

But there are mounds of evidence to the contrary. At least on the surface there is. There are science reports about the health problems associated with eating meat, but they look at the heavily processed food from grain-fed animals raised in confinement. Food that is, at best, no healthier than the heavily processed vegan foods. That slips past the blinders and couples with the arguments against factory farming which builds complete but sloppy arguments. The evidence that a vegan diet is healthier than a non-vegan one comes

from the same science that has argued for and against just about everything relating to meat consumption, disease, and the worth of animal lives. Scientists have confirmed just about any ludicrous idea from genetics to the health benefits of smoking to the benefits of civilized life; I just wonder why we would believe them at all.

The truth is much more common sense than anything: we're omnivorous animals that are meant to be wild. Vegans don't need morality to disagree with this, but the mounds of evidence probably wouldn't have existed without the morality that made such denial possible. That morality spreads from the Hindu belief in ahimsa.

Hindus are agriculturalists living in a land that requires a lot of work to farm. What they do get from farming may fill the stomach, but it doesn't give everything that someone needs to stay healthy. Here, like among all pastoralists, animals, such as cows, are vital for a number of reasons. Harnessed to plows, they ease the workload in tilling the fields and their dung is a great source of fuel. The fact that they give dairy products that are comparable in nutrients to meat has meant they're worth a lot more alive than dead. The problem is that while this may make sense, it doesn't keep the starving poor from killing and eating them. Throughout the history of civilization, law never worked so well as when it was coming straight from the divine. Hence we get ahimsa, the belief that it is morally wrong to kill animals.

It doesn't take long for the religious and philosophical side of any practice to take off on its own. You can be relatively healthy eating dairy, but the utility can fade to the divine purity that arises. Veganism may be the natural morphed end product of ahimsa. Over hundreds of years, it has taken off on its own and though ahimsa tends to be upheld by non-Hindu vegans, you don't need to hear the name or be a Hindu to take part in its aftermath. But Hindu vegans in India were also healthier than their ideological descendants in the West. Still eating predominantly local foods from smaller scale farms, there was not the mediated need to have a final clean product. Their vegan foods carried the nutrients of insects and animal dung serving as fertilizer making them healthier in the end, but not vegan in the purified Western sense.

Whether or not the connection is direct, this is the hype that made the later scientific evidence thinkable and then available. What ensued was an entirely different version of human history that became

the ideological backing for Western vegans. The basic belief is that humans don't need to eat meat.

This is approached a number of ways.

The first way this works is to revise biology. One fun fact that is thrown around the most is that carnivores have much longer intestines than herbivores. The argument is that our intestines are closer to herbivores on this, so, the argument goes, we aren't meant to eat meat. The problem is, this is also bullshit. We have a fraction the intestinal tract of ungulates, but also of dolphins and whales—both carnivores. In terms of length, humans are right between dogs and bears—both obligate carnivores. The obvious counterpoint is that we do eat meat and we do digest it. In fact, we've been doing this for quite a long time. The supposed evidence, presented by vegans, that we don't comes down to outright lies, such as: the average meat eater may have up to ten pounds of undigested meat in their stomachs by the time they die.

Much like the fuel used to cook the vegetarian diet of ahimsa-following Buddhists: this too is bullshit.

The problem isn't that we can't digest meat, but that processed and domesticated foods simply are not healthy and/or digestible. That actually applies less to meat than it does soy, wheat, and, of course, sugar.

Which isn't to say all meat is equal. Factory farmed animals are pumped full of chemicals, extra fatty from a sedentary life (also, like us, fattened on the empty calories of grains and legumes), the meat is often preserved, overcooked, overeaten, and they eat the same GMO crops that most of us do. That adds up to a pretty nasty end product. Combined with a diet and lifestyle that doesn't get the proper exercise or develop right from birth, it's not really any surprise that we can't digest it properly or that heart disease is one of the major killers in the West.

But there's a catch here: heart disease is a major killer, but the correlation between meat consumption and heart disease is false. But vegans are quick to grab onto it despite that. Heart disease isn't an issue about eating meat. It's an issue about eating grains, legumes, and other high-carbohydrate foods. Specifically, in our case, sugar, but the body treats all of those things the same. Meat can compound the issue, but it doesn't cause the initial damage, it is all of those very vegan-friendly products of agriculture—things hunter-gatherers ate little to none of—that do.

If eating meat were a major health issue, it wouldn't make sense for us to have eaten meat for millions of years. People like the Arctic hunter-gatherers would probably have the worst health. They do have some of the highest concentrations of diabetes among other numerous diet related diseases, but that is only after they were forced to settle by the government and only having a diet of canned vegetables and processed grains with the occasional supplement of wild meat. When their diet was an average of 80-90% meat, they were far healthier than any farmer could ever have been.

Vegans will argue otherwise. The argument goes that we've come up from a form of savagery and through civilization we're attaining a higher and more moral and ethical reality than throughout all of human history. We're reaching the peak of morality and humanity and it is part of the synthetic superior world that we are creating. Groups like PETA really have no problem embodying this ridiculous notion. But you can hardly give them credit for it; I think the engineers of progress came up with this as a justification for imperialism, colonization, and genocide. The central message is as old as domestication: nature needs improvement. I hope I don't have to draw out the obvious problems with this further.

Other biological points refer to our body. We don't have the same teeth as most carnivores that much is true, but we also have hands with opposable thumbs that can do the same job as teeth to tear. We lack talons, beaks, and claws, but like many animals, we are tool users. Many vegans will argue that tools for hunting are relatively new, but that is continually being disproven.

Despite this, there are more ways to get meat than bows and atlatls. Things like rabbit sticks, nets, crude clubs, and traps are all far easier to make and use and the chance of them showing up in the archeological record is remote. They are only likely to show up if the archeologists were looking for them—if they leave a trace at all—but so long as we associate stone tools with hunting, that's not likely to happen. It has also been increasingly obvious that persistence hunting—running down your prey—might be among the oldest forms of hunting. Though rare, it's still practiced today, but it has been found in cave art as well. Even where we weren't hunting, we're still rather adaptive: we can scavenge. Contemporary and recent hunter-gatherers certainly had no qualms about doing it.

Whatever way you cut it, we've been eating meat successfully for some time.

On the whole, biological comparisons rarely hold up. Often there is a chart of strict carnivores and herbivores with humans running down the middle. Well, we are in the middle. You are as likely to see us grazing and chewing cud as you are going to hunt like a jaguar. So what is that middle column? Omnivore. Or, more accurately, obligate carnivore. This should be fairly obvious. We are fully capable of eating fruits and vegetables and we have attributes of other hunters such as forward-looking vision and a natural tendency to run straight rather than from side to side like most typical “prey.” We also do totally fine eating a full on carnivorous diet; we actually require zero carbohydrates for our bodies and minds to function perfectly.

The biological trend leads to a look at the rest of the primate family.

Like most primates, we do hunt. Vegans simply look beyond this and attribute it to a habit of primates in captivity. That’s something that most who have observed primates in the wild have noted. Even if we were to push that aside, we can’t ignore something even more significant: the primate subgroup that all modern primates (including humans) are said to evolve from were insectivores. That’s something that has never left us and can be seen in our wild counterparts as much as among other primates. Beetles, grubs and grasshoppers are all high in protein and, though I can’t personally back this up at the moment, supposedly delicious.

Coming closer to the biological arguments are revisions of our entire history.

More recent vegan “naturalists,” especially the raw food enthusiasts, claim that not only were we originally strict vegans, but that fire was our downfall. True enough, fire did change things to a certain degree. We’ve been able to move into colder climates and in some areas, without it, we might not have survived the Ice Age. It has made foods that would otherwise be inedible open to us, ironically though, those foods are almost all vegan ones. This is all true, but we can’t forget that the domestication of fire was a spotty thing and not nearly as significant as Greek myths would likely have us believe. One thing is certainly true though; it didn’t take fire to make meat edible or hunting possible.

Raw food purists like San Diego’s Nature’s First Law group have taken things to such an incredible extreme. Not only are we

pure vegans, but eating cooked food is the cause of war and social injustice, eating bread is the “cause” of homosexuality and sexual deviance, and, best yet, eating cooked food causes balding and a shrunken penis! While certainly a bit of an extreme end of a fringe, the new raw purists have taken the entire Progress/evolutionary view to a major extreme: fire enabled us to leave the tropical areas where we supposedly evolved and lived. The idea is as ridiculous as it is frightening in whatever the practical application would be: either a flooding of humans into the tropical regions or a misanthropic purge of fire using, cooked-food eating heathens.

Unfortunately, the idea is spreading a bit. How it does is a bit of a morbid curiosity for me. People do live in the tropics, but they are far from vegan. While they, like most people on the planet, don’t eat nearly as much meat as the Arctic nomads, they are no where near being vegan. The Mbuti, nomadic hunter-gatherers in the rain forests of the Congo only learned how to make fire relatively recently, but it hasn’t increased or decreased the amount of meat they eat. And all coastal societies in the tropics eat far more fish than anything.

Living in the tropics does have its benefits from having largely ideal weather to having a year-round growing season with a larger assortment of fruits and vegetables, but there is no excess amount of wild sources of vegan protein among other things. Wild veganism is possible, but I would hardly say preferable. In the end it only carries on that evolutionary ideal of some kind of purity and I’m doubting the bountiful tropical fruits and vegetables will be as grateful as the vegans would like them to be for being eaten instead of “sentient” beings.

Along the lines of historical revision is the idea that vegetarianism has happened in large populations. That much is true, but never is it by choice. The diet of peasants is typically lacking in meat and is dependent upon grains, rice, or corn. It is also the lifestyle inflicted by a larger exploitative system, and the same one that puts them in a position where meat is rarely an option. The result is a typically vegan diet, but with it comes the problems of an imposed and improper diet: physical deformity, increased retardation and diseases, increased miscarriages, diseases like rickets from lack of calcium, and bones that never develop fully. That applies to the peasants of Indigenous civilizations in Latin America and throughout Europe and Asia. The Hindus are an exception, though they weren’t vegan

as we've already seen.

For the vegan, it doesn't matter if a number of these points are true or not, what matters is that there are a number of different approaches available. If one doesn't work, then try another, and sooner or later you'll win the argument. That is morality and ideology at work. That is those blinders put into work. But it is powerful, that is how it works. I'm no exception to this, my own blinders kept me from noticing all the physical consequences of eight years of veganism from anemia to a weakened immune system, a weaker stomach, a severe lack in all-around energy, and an often debilitating worsening of my ulcerative colitis.

That is ideology at work.

### *Sentience and Other Stupid Ideas*

Arguments for animal rights and many of the arguments for veganism revolve around the issue of sentience. The argument goes that if an animal is capable of feeling and perceiving then they, like us, are sentient and worthy of the same respect. Likewise, they shouldn't be eaten or enslaved. Honestly, I think this is one of the most dangerous ideas. Not because I think we have some natural domination or that there is something innately different between all beings, but because of its context.

The basis for deciding what is and isn't sentient is based upon the only thing we really know: ourselves. What is capable of feeling and perceiving is based on what we know about feeling and perceiving. Most notably this is a central nervous system like ours or similar observable reactions. So animals like cows, goats, sheep, horses, members of the canine, feline, and primate families fit the bill. Things get a bit tougher and more scientific when it comes to fish and insects.

Insects, of course, are very typically given the slight of hand when it comes to animal rights. Yeah, it bugs me too.

So what is the prize? We want them to have the same rights that humans are expected to have. The problem with rights is that they take government as a standard and, in the good liberal tradition, seek to improve it. That is a historical problem, and one that the animal rights advocates typically uphold without seeing the obvious irony.

In the West, white males were the standard for rights, then

white women, then non-white men, then non-white women, and so on. Rights have always been both a system of exclusion and a systematic means of exploitation and inequality. The government guarantees you this much—this is what rights offer, and even in the rare cases where governments are holding up their end of the deal, it is still in their hands. All governments exploit, all civilizations exploit, which is how they exist, that is what they must do to exist. What rights do is try to raise the bar of exploitation to an acceptable standard. I'm not sure that was ever a good idea and even less of something worth fighting for.

If we assume that rights are a good thing (a major stretch of the imagination), we still have to account for the reality that getting animal rights is a long and drawn out road. What might the steps be? Better conditions in factory farms, quicker and more efficient means of killing, more pasture land? Those are the obvious first steps in what would be a long battle and a far call from what any animal really wants: to be wild and free.

So who is speaking for whom and why are they speaking at all? What does a self-righteous ultra-domesticated human know about what a cow might want? If our void is full and we carry the weight of trying to fix civilization even though 10,000 years have shown that domestication has no real benefit, what can we do for the animals without eliminating the system that put them in cages in the first place? What you get is an ideological battleground for a morally superior identity and a call for action that in effect does little or nothing to actually improve the lot of “sentient” life.

That's not even the most dangerous part about the idea of sentiency though. It may be the dumbest, but the worst is the implications of dealing with a system of exclusion: when a new standard is set, old standards are given new strength. When you declare that some animals are sentient and others are not, you're not coming closer to the idea that all life—animal or not—is sacred or worthy of respect, you're just adding more to one side. Giving new rights to certain animals reinforces the idea that animal life is different and more worthy than plant life or the entirety of an ecosystem. If it takes a long battle to show that certain life is more worthy of our respect, it's going to be even more to argue that all life is worthy of that same respect.

Simply put, when you play on the terms of the domesticators, you are going to lose. The reality of wildness runs completely con-

trary to, and is totally incapable of coexisting with, civilization and even more so with modernized technological civilization.

The presumption of the animal rights movement is that a better world can come through civilization and that we can play on their terms. Even more ridiculously, there is the assumption that the animals and earth might benefit from this. The real solution becomes all the more obvious: only wildness benefits wild beings, and that will only come through the destruction of civilization.

### *Mad Cowboys and Even Madder Cowboys*

The only time that vegan ideology tends to have a deeper critique is of the modern food industry. But that only goes so far. The conditions of factory farms and slaughterhouses, like the meat markets and fast food restaurants, are appalling. All of the above are rather grotesque monuments to efficiency and production that really typify where our globalized civilization is now. We produce a lot of crap and disrupt and destroy natural communities to maintain this way of living.

This may be one of the greater areas for outreach among vegans. Not many people know where their meat, dairy, and other animal products come from or the conditions that the animals live under, which are truly horrid. Domestication is bad enough, but the rows of crowded cages are based on the same assembly lines used to make any other mass product. Keeping animals locked up, away from light and unable to stand, spread their wings, or stretch should be opposed.

The same can be said about animals kept for testing medications for diseases related to civilized living and for totally frivolous crap like make up and perfumes. No animal should ever be caged and tortured like that. The Animal Liberation Front is both necessary and commendable. But this tends to be where the messages are mixed. On the one hand you have the call for complete liberation, but on the other hand you have an attempt to modify the system of exploitation as we've seen.

Animal liberation can never be a part of civilization. And so long as it is based on vegan dogma and animal rights thinking, it will never be complete. We come back to domestication and the failure to really move beyond it.

A part of the vegan lifestyle is the promotion of "animal-friend-

ly” and “cruelty-free” businesses. What that means is that the idea of animal liberation tends to go hand-in-hand with the promotion of businesses, even though the producers and distributors of vegan foods are often some of the worst animal exploiters around. That goes for huge dairy corporations buying out soy milk companies, cigarette companies buying out organic food companies, and mega-corporations behind the bulk of the meat industry owning meat-free burger companies. Mainstream groups like PETA and animal rights gurus like Eric Marcus have actually gone out of their way to hold rallies in support of Burger King in support of their veggie burger, which isn’t even vegan.

What is the message here? What is the goal? Is it liberation, or is it another business venture like any other?

These might be the extreme examples, but perhaps they’re also the most honest. The world envisioned by vegans where animals are liberated and everyone is vegan is a pipe dream, and a bad one at that. It simply is not possible. And I think most animals would agree: it is not at all preferable.

It is in this pipe dream that animal rights folks put out their environmental image and try to show why anyone concerned with the fate of the earth should be vegan. It is also here that the criticism of the modern food industry comes forward, albeit briefly. A huge target here is the mass production of cattle. Cattle, being fed a strict diet of little to nothing that their counterparts would eat, become one of the larger sources of pollution because of their indigestion. Huge areas of forest are cleared throughout the world to grow grains and corn for their consumption and more often than not, this is a magnet for bioengineered crops.

It takes twelve pounds of grain to “produce” one pound of grain-fed beef. Simply put, a bare minimum of twelve times more domestication goes into those animals over crops. It is often overlooked that grass-fed animals level the playing field against crops, often, like their wild relatives, becoming net negative carbon emitters. But for all farming, wild animals like coyotes and wolves know where that extra domestication comes from: land that was once wild. They’ve been waging their own war on the domesticating menace by taking out herds of cattle, sheep, and other herding animals taking over where they once lived, rarely is any of the meat actually eaten. That is a war against civilization in the literal sense. The ethical question should be coming a bit clearer, at least in terms

of supporting domestication.

Animal rights arguments draw these points out to offer an alternative: in a vegan world, animals would not be reared for food, so all of this waste would not exist. Even setting aside the argument that no one should be eating those grains and legumes, there's another problem here. On the one hand, an extremely valid problem: domesticated animals are eating the world. But on the other hand is that Ahimsa-based principle that all life is sacred. So should the animal industry end, where would these animals go? Probably the same place vegans are putting them now: sanctuaries.

Now these sanctuaries are supposed to be a safe haven, a place where animals can go to live out the rest of their lives safely and securely. They are supposed to be freed. I worked at one of these sanctuaries and can honestly say that there is little to nothing that has improved about their lives, with only a few exceptions. In reality, they have been moved from one fenced-in area to another, being given more room only when those animals come from a factory farm or extreme abuse cases. They are fed the same food that they would be getting in a factory farm, producing the same methane, and their lives are still dictated by human desires. Except this time around, those humans are bringing them into more of a petting zoo for the vegan ego than a place where they are given proper respect.

Instead, they serve as a living monument to lifestyle choices. Where they do roam, they do no less damage than any other farm. I've seen this happen. Even a small herd of cattle can completely destroy streams, contaminate soil, and just generally wreck an area very quickly. The only difference is that they tend to get a wider area to destroy and since they're not being killed, more time to do it in. And I don't think I'm overstepping my boundaries to say they're not much happier. They spend just as much time trying to get out and not be enclosed.

What we are seeing is the domesticator mindset in action. This is the downfall of rights and do-gooder movements: they are self gratifying rather than proactive. The question of domestication is never raised, at least not with any seriousness. A significant part of that is a refusal to question the basic lessons of the domesticators; the vision of a glorious and ethically bound future, the end product of millions of years of slow progression and building upon humanity.

And wildness falls behind again. The slaughterhouse becomes

the symbol of exploitation and the point is missed, but the civilized may never see it fully. The central issue is a fear of death. The vegans carry the message that it is better to live a long life encaged than a short one that ends in systematized murder. That is the burden of civilization: that we would rather prolong life than live it.

No doubt, the slaughterhouse is never a great thing, but it is feared because it represents death. It is the farm that is the problem. It is the farm that has always been the problem. It enslaves humans to a life of work building wealth for others just as the work animals of the Hindu spend their lives building the world that the Hindu chose to live in. That is the world of domestication: that is the problem.

But this cannot be questioned. The vegan world requires domestication. It may well be the peak of domesticated society. Staples of the vegan diet like rice, beans, soy, and grains require plots and rows of crops. They are all the most intensive and detrimental crops to the earth. The plowed fields and necessary transportation systems tear up the earth and as the soil washes away the only options for continued farming are chemical fertilizers or, once again, using animal dung. Delusions of a global organic and vegan horticulture are simply unattainable with this population as they are unlikely. A vegan world is still a globalized technological, industrial civilization: little different than ours now.

All the while, the “liberated” animals living in sanctuaries become all the more like us: captives to a distant Future, enclosed, fed, and bred for a world that can never replace the innate being of wildness.

We feel its loss while the hand of the domesticator shoves it further away and leaves a gaping void in its wake.

### *Opening the Cages: Theirs and Ours*

I opened this essay with a statement that no other animal chooses their diet, especially for ethical and moral reasons. Perhaps that statement is a bit unfair because no other animal has created factory farms or civilization and enslaved the mass of life on this earth either. But my point is not that nothing matters or that we would all be better off buying meat and dairy as we would buying vegan foods. My point is that while veganism is an understandable response to the world now, vegan ideology and morality are all too often taken

as the goal in themselves. In the end, vegans take domestication to another step and continue to carry the mantle of civilization.

For many vegans, like those involved with PETA and similar groups, that may not be a problem. The association of meat eating as savagery is a part of their civilizing mission. The drunken, gossipy inner circle of vegan and sanctuary elites can sit back and soak up the empire that they've built for themselves in highly paid positions. They can push for their dogma to be spread by supermodels and celebrities, because that is part of the flashy, spectacularized world that they don't want to break from.

Being anti-wildness is no mystery: domesticated animals are given emphasis over wild ones. I can imagine that Ingrid Newkirk, founder of PETA, had no real ethical dilemma when she pushed for a PETA policy of gassing feral cats. The idea that there "aren't enough homes for them all" says plainly that they need homes, meaning, that they need humans. For her, domestication is the goal. I say, better dead than domesticated. What kind of life is it that we are living that is so worth maintaining? What world are these enslaved animals being "released" into?

To the point: what does animal liberation really mean? Does it mean freedom from being killed by humans, stuck in new farms where they are protected against wild predators and fed the same crap they were getting in the industry farms? Does it mean the continuation of mass, global agriculture to feed the world a new moral diet? All of these things are what we can see happening in practice. And I have a really hard time trying to understand how insane you have to be to really call this liberation.

All animals need one thing: wildness. We are no exception. That flow of life, that question-less existence which carries within it the feeling of an entirely interconnected community, is what we are all born for. It is the world that our bodies work with. But those changes call for more than a diet change.

Rewilding, as I see it, means a total life of resistance and reconnection. It means breaking down that self/other barrier that domestication builds and maintains. It means we need to stop seeing ourselves as outside of the community of life and to stop seeing things like non-animal foods as any less worthy than animals. We need to break the grasp of sentiency and other ideas that put humans and our closer relatives on a pedestal over wildness.

A part of this process is recognizing that we are hunters and gatherers. That doesn't mean that animals we may hunt became our natural enemies or that we have any different connection with them. That's not entirely correct: that relationship will change. It would no longer be a domineering sort of stewardship like veganism pushes, but a relationship among equals: the only relationship that should ever happen. That is a relationship that is forever deepened when you begin to read the tracks of animals around you, when you spend hours and days watching how animals interact, and begin to see life as they would live it. It is about breaking mediation and breaking down the alienating technology that reinforces our domesticating relationship.

Rewilding is a great process of checking our domesticating behavior and thinking. In the process, we are free to find our own animality, to seek out our own wildness. It means becoming self-sufficient and no longer taking part in a system that exploits globally and locally by its nature. In that self-sufficiency, we are free to develop relationships with others that are not about using each other.

So what does this mean in terms of day-to-day life? I'm not interested in outlining some program or creating a new ideology or morality for how we must be. I don't really care what personal decisions people make, because that is not my main problem. I can deal with people on a one-to-one basis as things go, but my target is civilization. Liberation will only come through its destruction and an end to the domestication process.

In practice that means opening cages and crippling the system of enslavement the only way that seems to work: bolt cutters and incendiaries. What the ALF and ELF have been doing for decades has been fighting on the forefront of domestication and trying to keep wildness wild. It means targeting the system at its central points. It means getting a deeper understanding of how civilization works so that we can target it more effectively. It means taking our lives into our own hands and not being afraid to act on it.

As far as diets go, the most I can recommend is to be aware of the foods that you would be eating without domestication: wild foods such as nuts, berries, plants, mushrooms, eggs, and, yes, fish and meat. The ideal diet is the one that we've grown to: one that is foraged, scavenged, and hunted. For me, that hunting means hunting in the ancient sense: simple tools and all the relationships that come with it. Not the mediated macho hunting crap.

Eating this way doesn't necessarily throw out any kind of ethical consideration for the consequences of our actions. One of the most obvious short-term solutions is to eat road kill, an idea that is becoming far more acceptable than the most ideological of vegans care to acknowledge. From road kill, you can get skins for clothing, bones for tools, muscles and organs for meat, and knowledge that this animal's death is not entirely in vain.

These deaths are the inescapable consequence of a system that can produce such massive and impersonal technology: complete with disconnected users. An ancient hunting rite is the promise to the animal that it is killed to ensure that it will never be domesticated or taken without reason. That is a promise to look over its future generations and ensuring that they will grow up and live in the same wildness that all life should live in. It is a unifying tie and assurance that all things wild should be wild.

This is what we've lost through domestication. In taking road kill or any animal, I feel a promise to do everything I can to come back to that original relationship: a promise to destroy the civilization that binds both of us to a life of captivity and exile in our own homes.

That is a step back into our own wildness, into complete liberation. Back into the very wildness that vegan and animal rights ideologies remain a barrier to.

2005

# The Disgust of “Daily Life”

## *Preface*

A lot has changed since May 2001.

I wrote *Disgust* the evenings of my last 2 days of work before putting everything in storage to spend a number of months traveling and then living in tent or a farmhouse without electricity. I wrote it, looked over it once, threw together a cover from magazine cutouts from the library and printed hundreds of them before I'd have any time to realize all the errors I'd made in the process.

And ever since then I'd been meaning to make a number of changes and toss in more. Even change a few of the clumsier words so there weren't thousands of copies made and still in circulation that have parts scratched out and written over in pen.

It's not just that I couldn't get around to it; it's that every time I tried I found too much that *should* have been different or changed, but couldn't do it without altering the entirety of it. I can simply never recreate what I was feeling and thinking at that exact time again.

My brother had died months before *Disgust* was written. It's always been a hard thing to deal with, but for me it just brought my understanding of the problems of civilization to another level. It was then that I really understood that the shit life of this civilization and its maintenance would eventually kill me, and that eventuality was looming. But it wasn't the inevitable end that scared and enraged me, it's that I'd be spending my time on this amazing Earth surviving within a system that was consuming myself and all living

beings. The luxurious misery of Modernity grinds the soul.

There is plenty left unsaid in this pamphlet, but I can't and wouldn't want to rewrite it. I've gotten more responses to this than anything I've written since, and a great majority from people who'd recently lost someone. There's a kind of rawness that I'm thinking is better left untouched.

I do hope that anyone who reads this will take that rawness into consideration and see this as something that I've worked from and that the undeveloped ideas here are always being expanded upon (primarily in the pages of my own journal, *Species Traitor*, and *Green Anarchy*). There have been a number of changes in my thinking and I think some of my own militancy towards civilization might have been lost on readers through lines like "liberate the mind and the body will follow." It was never meant to be a cop out on action in any way, just my take on it.

I also haven't referred positively to revolution for years. I think it's a political trap and stuck in a mob mentality against the State or a particular government rather than civilization as a whole. I've written far more about this in *Species Traitor* and since have been pushing the concept of *primal war*: an attack directly on domestication through resisting civilization in its entirety and rewilding on the personal and communal levels.

With that said, I hope you'll take it for what it is and go from there. Never forget your rage.

Kevin Tucker  
March 2007.

Dedicated to Michael David Tucker, 1977-2000.

## Towards Autonomy

Our culture suffers from an extreme personality disorder. It seems that it is wearing so much armor that it forgets it's even connected to its body. The face is so preoccupied with its masks that it forgets to look down.

We've built ourselves up so high that we feel we can neglect our

roots, our bearings. We just say, “Here we are, so deal with it.” In our “race for the cure” approach to life, we take what we see as a given. We stop questioning how we got into the situations that we have. We stop worrying and begin to thank the machine.

And the machine surrounds us.

It is BP selling stuffed endangered animal plush toys with fill-ups. It is Phillip Morris out to find the cure for cancer. It is Weyerhaeuser protecting the wilderness, and the police protecting urban youth from violence. It is Monsanto feeding the starving Third World children, and Channel One teaching First World children.

This is it: the dichotomy of good and evil. Life and survival, damnation and salvation, dictator and leader—take your pick. This dichotomy that underlies the conquests of “progress.” Millenniums of conquering, but now it comes down to public relations.

“Sink or swim” has been changed to “float with us and you’ll worry no more.” We plunge into the undying righteousness of our creators/sustainers. You can live forever, but the fine print is getting harder to read as we drag on and lose our vision to the luminescent glow of TVs, in-store track lighting, computers, and streetlights.

We want more than anything to never die. This constant search for limbo permeates our lust for life, since pure freedom doesn’t have the catchy jingles that its zombie replacements willingly offer.

The dying desperately grasp the life they’ve never had.

We become obsessed with progression into a future of such technological magnitude that we need never even breathe for ourselves. Defined by an over-reluctance to push the “past” further behind (onto “e-history bookshelves”) has placed us into a “might is right” corner where “the ends”—progress and growth—have presumptuously justified any “means” which may arise. Biological and ecological decimation become the norm.

And where does a cure fit in?

The search for cures is a part of the unquestioning ideology of civilization. To search for a cure is to level the playing field, so to speak. A cure presumes one is needed, that the problem occurs naturally. This turns something like cancer or mental and physical impediments into genetic mishaps, rather than what they are: results of the means to a nonexistent end.

The search for such ends is the digging of our own graves. The

cure for one problem is the cause for the next, and as long as we isolate each problem the cycle is self-perpetuating.

What we need is autonomous action that doesn't turn a blind eye to the foundations of civilization. We must ask ourselves if this is really what should be occurring. The reasoning for the entire social order must be brought into question. Only when this is done can we stop sacrificing for the future, and start living now.

The following essay is intended to further draw on this critique of civilization, on how its existence is requiring that our lives become a series of isolated moments.

## The Disgust Of “Daily Life”

Enter the headache.

It comes and goes with such regularity that you don't even notice it anymore. There may be a connection, but for all you know it could be the only one this hour, this day, this week, this month, or this year.

Enter the medicine.

Small. Yellow. Simple. Take two and call the doctor in the morning. In go the pills, gelatin covered to slide down your throat as the chaser to your diet Pepsi.

The acids in your stomach dissolve the slick packaging on the pill, which delivers the medicine into your bloodstream where it proceeds on throughout your body. Chemicals are exchanged, and you no longer feel the pain: problem solved.

At least for now.

Conflict, resolution: A problem arises, and half an hour later, it is resolved. Brief periods of excessive information at a slightly increased volume flood in, soak in, and time passes by. Life is unfolding before your eyes.

Life becomes your sitcom. You become the plot of the love you never had. You dream of the kiss that comes after the misery and toil at the hands of a deranged killer or the pursuit of material desires. Always just over that rainbow. You become the hero, you

become the villain, you are the lover, and you are the free rider. You are immersed in a world of make believe, new twists and turns are available for \$3.59 a night, the must-see addition only requires submersion into prime time. The excitement of a life handcrafted by well-paid dreamers and advertisers engulfs your world, and passes the time until that point.

It is called disassociation; it floods our lives and is imperative to the survival of civilization. Life is now a series of points: the path has been laid out before you, but there is a guide.

Take the hand, look both ways, and there is safety here for you —your Guiding Light or knight in shining armor.

Stage one: your parents are the absolute authority. They know all, not in a literal sense, but reality is subjective for all intents and purposes.

Segue, stage two: your parents gradually give way to state-certified teachers. Your subjective reality intermingles with true or false points of positive reality, sometimes multiple choices, but don't dismay: there is only one right answer.

Stage three: your strengths and weaknesses are now based on a sliding scale of wage-value. Some occasional breaks are permitted, but the path is now being called destiny or fate.

You have a longer chain in this realm though. You are free range now, just so long as you are close enough for the culling. The world of work is the most beautiful prison you ever existed in. You don't want to be there, but it is a necessary evil. The base of happiness is judged off a scale of how much you can bear: how much better off you are, or, as it is more commonly stated, how much worse things could be.

Just as stages one and two build up to this, stage three leads to stage four. Stage four takes on a new face, however. You can now relish in the thoughts of graduating from stage three, and the reward comes in the form of being granted the authority to guide in the previous stages. The only authority left now is the one that you've heard of all this time. "God," the lord of lords, savior, etc. the one you respected out of fear, is now holding your hands. You can be taken back at any time now. It is beyond you. Just enjoy your last

breaths of life on earth.

There arises a problem. At some point between the second and fourth stages you began excreting blood. Your stool has become less solid and sometimes you are worried about the problem, but it could go away. You pass it off as long as you can, but at some point you think it is getting serious.

You immediately think to call the certified, all-knowing doctor, the one who has conquered the world of medicines—the healer of all that ails you. However, you picked up on the taboos of not talking about such unpleasant, albeit necessary, bodily functions. You delay more. Advil pushes the pain further and further into the future.

This can't go on forever, but you're trying.

At some point you physically hit bottom and decide it is time to seek the medical industry's finest. A series of tests are done, and the computer spits out a list of possible malfunctions in your flesh machine. Using acquired knowledge that can only merit professional opinion—fact, as you may refer to it—you follow the instructions laid out on the official receipt that you are given.

You then take this from pusher to dealer. Further instructions are available on the bottle, would you like liquid or capsule form? Just be wary around heavy machinery.

System error: a slight problem has been overlooked. Return to step one, the medicinal institution, and this time seek other variations of the read-out on your status report. From there you will be pointed in the right direction, which will give you a receipt for the proper cure.

Repeat until desired results are met.

Back to your television—perhaps purchased from Best Buy or Wal-Mart, the physical formulations of the imperialism that is inherent in civilization. You see them everywhere, and as they drive out what lay there before: either nature or a store carrying similar products owned by locals.

The surroundings are becoming more like home, and home is expanding at the speed of light. All produced and reproduced by machines created to manipulate the miracles of the natural world. Black tops, bright lights, security cameras, smiles at the cost of an hourly wage, the prescribed friendly greeting, the cold, hard cash

being electronically transferred into your account. The buzz of science dulls you into passive existence in a high-speed world. Ideas are turned into products so clever, you can't pass them up. Products you never knew it existed, but now you can't live without it. You are plugged in, and you are living at the speed of innovation.

*We are really moving now, can't you feel the excitement?*

The television you have just purchased has been farther across the world than you might ever dream of going. Each circuit board has more than likely been through the hands of a woman between the ages of 17-25 in a "developing" nation. This is the global interpretation of stage three. It translates into being pulled in when needed, sifting at a station in a dimly lit warehouse with your eyes up to a magnifying glass, sometimes 12 hours a day, until you are no longer of use to the global megamachine.

This is the magic of making a microchip smaller than a cracker with more memory than the human mind, that "computer made of meat."

This same magic walks into a new area where it can be produced at a price so as to be available to every American. This is traditionally a small village, primarily self-sustained by small-scale, localized agriculture and in some cases hunting and gathering.

The factory owners have recently seen the amount of labor being wasted on such a workless, morally-deprived living, and have realized the potential.

The steps of development begin here, at conception: the dirty thought in someone's mind or wallet. The new strategic point has been marked off, and no better time than now to buy in.

The next steps vary, but they follow a formula laid out by those would-be computers, academics. Take the amount of product that could be acquired minus the amount of development, which consists of such things as the raw material costs and costs of possible force required to ensure plans going accordingly, and compare to the longer-term effectiveness. Take into consideration that academics aren't always the best at foresight, but the rest is history.

*If there were to be a eulogy for civilization, its final words would be: "it was reasonable."*

*And so it goes.*

The headaches are becoming stronger and more frequent, and you are beginning to notice that the bleeding has gotten worse, occasionally resulting in the vomiting of a mixture of blood and half-digested, pesticide-soaked food. Your persistent visits to the doctor have only resulted in nausea, dizziness, fainting, migraines, and so on. The price of the prescription and status reports have exceed your threshold—even a price that would take a few generations to pay off. You grow tired and stage four is coming closer to completion, point by point.

Your faith in the medicinal institution is lingering. You see other possibilities, such as herbal remedies, but the information has been buried deep into history, and you haven't the strength or time left to dig it up. There is nowhere left to turn, so you keep going along the path that brought you here.

The doctors have produced a list of possible flaws that gave way to your weakened state. The list is extensive, and nothing is for sure, but they keep coming to one strong point: genetics. You have bad genes, and can only hope that your malfunctions can help to pinpoint the bad genes in the future, and then we can navigate the prospective nanotechnology to destroy these bad seeds.

Many have a strong faith that there is a fifth stage. They refer to it as the afterlife. It should not be seen as any kind of coincidence that as we move onward through the steps of progress with no overall improvements in life, there is an overwhelming appeal to this ideal.

It goes as follows: life on Earth is a test. We are here because we seek the next life as a part of the Eternal Light, and as such we have to follow all the rules so we go to the good side—heaven—instead of the bad; we dare not even speak its name unless it is in the words of the creators of God, or their modern-day translators.

This changes the whole outlook on how things are. It's not so bad to merely get by when the stakes are raised like this.

Take another look at the foundations of civilization. A basic tenet of civilized life is the dedication to progress: the ideology that not only is there perfection, but that it is attainable and should be sought after.

Dedication to progress has us running in circles, and there is no end, there cannot be. A situation could always be technically

improved. As long as this is true, there will never be perfection. It resides at the end of the rainbow.

Just follow the gold-covered road.

We're sacrificing ourselves to feed the apparatus of civilization, based on an impossible idea. It's a pretty big pill to swallow. But if we keep our heads up and follow the rainbow it doesn't seem so bad. As long as there is a destination, the journey becomes worth it. The progression of stages can also be seen mirroring this, turning the question of "are we there yet?" into the answer of "not yet, but soon..."

The eventual situation of bringing together the conceptual heaven and the physical Earth makes it all a little easier to chew, but faith tends to linger against the test of time.

The "developing" continues.

At first it may not seem so bad. The factory is built and life goes on. The future isn't so clear yet. Some try to live on as they had before, but it's not so easy.

Complications arise: factories require a large amount of resources. These are extracted in any way that is seen as necessary for producing the end result, profits. Holes are dug in the soil to extract raw materials, trees are destroyed to make way for roads, airstrips are made, and docks are required. Lots of noise: lots of everything. The ecosystem may suffer from shock, but no one cares to look.

The people notice it, but no one is listening to them. They get in the way now, and they are prospective labor. They are also placed in strategic zones for water extraction. Somehow the "savages" realized the importance of living closer to (previously clean) water. Can't have that anymore.

Life sources give way to strategy for profit making. The factories not only take in water though. They need somewhere to dump their waste. The water is right there; the stream could just carry it off. Out of sight, out of mind.

It is reasonable, of course.

One other problem: the televisions require chemicals in order to guarantee that the machine functions as intended. These aren't to be taken lightly, but they are anyways. The workers can account

for this, those who can still function that is. The “developing” areas become wastelands, but forget about it, that’s there not here. “You can’t stop progress!”

It’s called disassociation.

It’s coming a little closer to home.

This time you go to the new specialist, and the news is you are going to require more than a receipt to be turned into bottles of the pill.

They say you have cancer. They discover a lump in your breast, testicle, brain, throat, lung, what have you, and it contains a tumor, a black mass of decaying tissue, which will soon infect the rest of your body. That is, what hasn’t been destroyed already.

You aren’t the only sick one though. Some say the Earth is suffering, but the supposed experts say it’s getting better or it’s not so bad.

Years of pouring chemicals into the air, water, and soil has started to take its toll. The Earth develops a tumor, but it’s different than its animal version. In one main instance, it doesn’t just infect the air, but eliminates it: there is a hole in the ozone layer that is the size of the United States. UV rays come pouring in. It takes a significant increase in skin cancer of humans to get attention.

Coral reef is heading towards extinction. We see no value in it perhaps, but you don’t miss it till it’s gone.

This isn’t enough to slow down civilization.

*We suffer from the Midas touch. Everything we touch becomes gold.*

*We see through the eyes of reason. It is our epistemology: seeing is believing. Everything we encounter is scaled off our base of reason, which translates to resource value. This flaw will prove to be fatal.*

In the distant enough future, everything is resourceful, it’s just a matter of where you draw your lines. This is a flaw. By rating things on this scale, we are judging only by the lines that we know.

It is absolutely impossible to understand the function of every bit of the world. It cannot be done by anything or anyone, and there shouldn’t be a reason for wanting or needing to do this. The fact that we think this needs to be done says more about our current

situation than anything. That, however, isn't going to keep our shortsightedness from creeping back up on us. Civilization doesn't appreciate criticism.

They say that the cancer may be caused in part by inheritance—those damn bad genes again. Someone aside from Midas may be quick to point out that exposure to dioxin (one very commonly occurring carcinogen) in small amounts over a relatively short amount of time can be stored in fat cells and carried on through birth for up to seven generations. This is quickly overlooked.

Time to dig deeper into our flawed genes.

The failures of our well-reasoned, scientific breakthroughs are quickly stashed away in the pages of history. We have a very hard time dealing with problems like this, for they would force us to question the basis of progress itself if we looked any closer.

*We don't have to dig very deep to find the examples of lead paint or numerous pesticides, but where are we going with this?*

They turn deeper inside your cells.

Wrong turn.

Dig a little deeper into the pages of history. Not too long ago a man named Adolf Hitler took on the problems posed by genetics. Problems found by geneticists. Those who profit may be very quick to pass off the genocidal results of such reasoning. Perhaps they just don't want us to try to stop it before it goes beyond our control.

The cancer in your cells is the result of excessive exposure to carcinogens. The constant low level radiation from your television, computer, and track lighting, the dangerous levels of UV rays, the NutraSweet in your diet Pepsi—which contains Phenyethelene, a well known carcinogen—on top of pesticides in your food, burning gasoline in the air, smog, and everything else considered a necessary evil.

The headaches may have been the result of constant exposure to this, added to the constant level of white noise coming from televisions, machines running, cars, horns, music, and so on. Pressure from work didn't help it either.

The medicine you took for the headaches didn't cure that though, it merely covered up the pain. This didn't come free of wear

on your body. The excessive acids have been taking their toll on your intestines, which are now thinning out, and you suffer from internal bleeding, causing the bloody stool that you have been leaving behind. The damage caused by cancerous cells has left you unable to heal sufficiently from this.

It was reasonable at the time though, and so it goes.

There may actually be more than five stages. In fact, there is extremely strong evidence that a stage exists between four and five.

It would seem that faith begins to linger as stage five comes to a close, and this actually does make more sense.

The entire system of stages is as much a fabrication as that of time, order, superiority, and so on, but the concept of an afterlife (specifically heaven or hell) is an extreme abstraction.

*Essentially, when you die your body will decompose and you will once again become a part of the Earth. You will spread through life forms for millions of years, and in this sense the Earth is your ancestors and future generations: ashes to ashes, dust to dust. This is a part of life, it is the cycle that never ends and never begins. We never leave this life, but our relationship with every animal, plant, tree, etc., changes with our composition and decomposition.*

*This is the way that life is seen when you participate in the community of life.*

*This no longer includes us.*

*We have rejected the community of life by the creation of civilization.*

Once things became centered on human needs, there wasn't really room for much else. It may start with the best of intentions, but we are told that there's no stopping progress.

Every being manipulates its environment. This is how the world is meant to work. Things even out in a sense. In a community there are always acts to ensure balance, this is the only way that things can carry on.

When a group of humans found ways to see themselves as a species separate from the community of life—as superiors, in the image of god—balance no longer became an issue.

When something has been working for you, then it would be strange to question it in great detail. Perhaps this is why civilization moved at the rate that it did, but we'll never know either way. What we do know is that it violently moved beyond its boundaries and could continue to do so only by eliminating alternatives. There is no balance in war.

By declaring superiority over the community of life, war was declared. This isn't a battle that you just win and walk away from; it is a constant state of baffle. Things remain in the air so long as it is conceivable that your power can be taken from you, so therefore you must always be on the offense. It really is a ridiculous idea.

*Midas is being born and reborn.*

You drive along the highway. Alongside the road there is occasionally a well-dressed monument at the point of death for some innocent victim of technology.

Each marker is decorated so that it may draw attention to the area, perhaps so that the victim's family can receive more attention for their loss, for when this is done it seems that there may have been some reason for the person's untimely demise. For whatever reasons it is done, it usually does nothing more than help the family dwell on the unjust situation.

Most people hardly notice the markers, and if they do, they occupy a small amount of that person's thought ("What if that was for someone in my family? Nah, not to me."). We think back to the car pushers. They show us more videos of prosthetic humans surviving high-speed collisions.

The simulation really does wonders for us. Our confidence is bought, and we drive with the satisfaction that if we were to run directly into a wall at 60 miles per hour, we would only end up seriously crippled, but still alive. We are safe, and as the ad says, we have found freedom.

It is called disassociation.

*We're going a little too fast now.*

*We wonder: how could it be misconstrued that we are declaring war on the community of life? We are, of course, animals. Therefore, as long as natural beings still exist in the natural world, we have a big*

*future ahead of us.*

*One story goes that we started with the simple idea of planting seeds of our favorite foods so that we could have more of the ones we like. We continued our ways of gathering and hunting to sustain, only now we had the added bonus of more of “the good stuff”. Over time, we started wanting a little bit more. Why eat a piece when you can take the whole pie?*

*We became more dependent on a certain situation. The last few years, the crops turned out better by planting them one way, and after a second trial and error, it finally started making more sense to us. We worked with the soil. We became masters of manipulating it so it produced more of the good stuff. A strong taste developed. We’d started to get attached to a certain way of life.*

*A minor re-evaluation could’ve put the whole situation into perspective. It wasn’t too late to jump ship and move on. The only problem was that it only takes one small group of dedicated individuals to change the world. And so it went.*

*We were spoiled now, and as such started growing more. The readily available, predictable food supply and a tendency to settle within an area lead to an increase in the population. We wanted more, then soon after we needed more.*

*It is called addiction.*

The cancer is becoming more of a problem. It has become apparent that the constant exposure to low-level radiation has greatly enhanced the ability of cancerous cells to move about and take over your body. This is treated with more radiation: a counterstrike.

All of this is taking its toll on your body. Working has been long gone as an option of payment for all of this, as you are too weak. The hair that you dyed into perfection biweekly is now starting to fall out. Walking becomes harder than you could ever imagine. You lay in bed staring out the window. There is a longing for all the life you wish you had, but it’s moving further away now. You tell yourself it’s too late, but there is an even greater reluctance to just let it go at that.

The future is looking grim. You know that someday soon, the person that you saw barely conscious in a hospital bed, being kept physically preserved by life sustaining technology, may very well be you.

You wish you had begun digging earlier. They are already

preparing your grave.

Disassociation comes as denial now.

*We can see the patterns that began to emerge. It wasn't just the planting of a few favorite crops, but the planting of a lot of them.*

*System error: Over time we began to realize that we aren't the only ones that have a favorite food. Insects are also a part of the community of life, of balance. They stick with certain plants because it works best that way. We started centralizing those plants though, and suddenly there were a lot of insects, too.*

*We had our favorite food in bulk in an easily accessible area, and the insects weren't the only ones centralizing now.*

*Human populations have increased and come together at this point, and they intend to be staying awhile.*

*System error: All of these humans weren't exempt from excretion. Year round, feces in the same area built up. Compost was filled, and there was a growing centralization of fecal matter. This was a definite problem. Balance was being lost due to new and permanent factors being added to the unsuspecting area. The predator of the predator of the pest was moving in. The scale was getting way too heavy on one side.*

*Midas is still blind to this. There's still way too much excitement in eating. Out of sight, out of mind: onward into history.*

It seems that it's becoming harder for people to let go of life.

There will never be affirmative scientific data verifying that your life can be held onto postmortem, but most people can share their experiences with this, when they are open.

The spectacle of ghosts has become one of great interest. This could be called stage four-and-a-half. It seems that the lingering of faith becomes most apparent here. Somewhere in the back of your mind, as you get closer to death, there is the feeling that something isn't right.

Hope for the future has become more of a hope for a second chance.

*We realize that we are no longer able to let go of life because we have*

*been cheated of it. We thought that we would live forever since we have been adding to the replacement of the community of life: life as dominators.*

*We realize that our participation in the advancement of the spectacle of civilization may have been a sacrifice not so easily justified. We lived so that human life could extend forever, but we've never even known what it feels like to live for even a moment.*

*Perhaps the state has done wonders to keep us in line under the illusion that symbolic immortality is worth dying for. It is our ideology, our epistemology, but Midas suddenly wants to know what the warmth of another being feels like.*

*So much prospect, so little time.*

*The search for perfection is getting old now, and we are pissed off about this.*

It turns to anger. Your whole body suddenly drops and there is a moment of confusion that is so much to take that you wish you were dead already. You thought picking the right laundry detergent or best electric beard trimmer was hard? They don't matter so much any more.

You look for everything and anything that will affirm yourself, but you are feeling that something is missing. You still have questions, and you're not about to let go until you get some satisfactory answers.

The highway is speaking. It is not just a stretch of concrete, pavement, and paint.

Look closer now, what do you see?

It comes alive. It no longer just sits there, mocking you. All this time and you never even knew it.

*We have cleared out forests, flattened, and put holes in mountains, drained the Earth, spent thousands of years to work on this thing that has now encompassed us—to think we put it there for our benefit!*

*It has overpowered us. It can't just sit there, it needs constant repair,*

*and each time we feel relieved that the work is done, we find ourselves hard at work again the next day. We built an empire, now we have to maintain it. We are its slaves and it is our master.*

In order to have the paper that this is printed on, there had to be that highway. There had to be trucks to transport, machines to copy, machines to make copy machines, extraction of oil for trucks, rubber for wheels, pulp for paper, and so on.

*The system is a trap. We can't look at it from isolated angles; because it has every tentacle wrapped around us so tight that we forget they're there sometimes.*

The concrete laughs back at you. It swallows a human life (the non-human life has been pushed off the road, a part of the standard maintenance) to make an example.

*We are the slaves.*

A few groups formulate to try and deal with the issue, but they forgot to keep digging.

Some say there needs to be stricter enforcement of driving, maximum levels of blood alcohol, and more laws on the book. Cars claim the lives of more people a year than an entire major war.

A movement called Mothers Against Drunk Driving pops up and becomes a household name. There has yet to be a Mothers Against Driving.

It is called disassociation.

The colostomy bag you are now having to use is half full of blood.

Time is running low.

There really isn't anything to say to the dying that will make it all better. All people say is that they are sorry. They shed tears and live in mourning of the dead ones.

It really is understandable, though.

*Death is a part of life; it is something that should never be mourned. Our loved ones pass on, but we should take happiness in feeling them*

*all around us. The plants growing from the ground are a part of them, the birds singing, the fish swimming—everything is the extension of their being now. There is never a doubt that they will be missed in their previous state, but we can only find more comfort in the state of nature in which they are now interlaced.*

*We refuse this though. We treat death in the most obscure manner. The body is painted and displayed to loved ones, while every bit of them on the inside now sits in the dumpster of a funeral home.*

*They are filled with chemicals now, and this is what we are crying to. A person who has never seen the deceased in life is now painting them to look the best they ever did. It makes no difference that they never looked that way; we just can't handle seeing them dead. It's not helping. It becomes harder to move on when we are worshipping the disguised body of the person we once knew, which is now anything but that. We dress them up and make believe that they have found happiness now in a dream world that we can't touch just yet. We make it easier on ourselves by displaying the corpse as if they were just sleeping.*

*This has more bearing than it seems. We hold dearly to the lives we never had, and we refuse to let others slide through. We scream and cry out, "why did this happen?" but we're afraid to look for an answer.*

It's becoming harder to find a corpse that died of sincerely natural causes. More lives are being lost to the diseases of civilization. These include cancer, AIDS, sudden infant death syndrome, drug overdoses, fatal accidents, suicides, gunshots, and so on. If you refuse to see it for what it really is, it won't just go away.

You feel it again.

Your body is dropping. Such an intense mix of emotions, you couldn't even pin one of them. The extremes stand out: anger, fear, and depression. You want to destroy something; you want to hold something. Such a mix only results in helplessness. You have found a definition of the word "void" only in this instance.

*It's all there.*

*We scratch the surface of life daily, but we feel we have wandered too far. Somewhere on the brink of fear and desperation lies your breaking point. Everyone has one, and it has different meaning to*

*everyone. It can't be taken away. It can be dangerous or it can be the greatest thing that ever happened. It opens up a world of possibilities.*

*The problem is, we are so isolated. For many, this is the point of suicide, rampages, drug problems, and so on. We are reaching out, but the only hand that we know of is consumption, be it of medicine, alcohol, products, anything. We see the person hitting that point and we want desperately to reach out, but something is holding us back. It is the same hand. It is saying come float with us and you'll never worry again, and it isn't lying.*

*It will take us for the ride of our lives. Through hills that can only exist via electrodes, machines that provide the pleasure of never having to do anything again, the love that will never leave us, the sex that will create and fill our desires, everything.*

*If we fall into it, there is no turning back. But if we accept it, it is accepting death. It is accepting a world devoid of possibilities, devoid of life. Everything is planned, everything works, and nothing will ever go wrong. We may feel a void from lack of non-mechanical compassion or even communication, but it will eventually find an electrode to kill that part off too. It is utopia, and it lies over the rainbow. It suffers a fatal flaw though: it is only an illusion.*

*There are no more distinctions to be made. The problems and draining we feel inside is the same as the problems that are draining the community of life dry. Every bit of medicine we take, every hour of work, every dollar spent on food, is connected. These are the costs of an experiment gone wrong.*

*Being reasonable is no longer an excuse. It absolutely cannot go on any longer.*

*We have come to see life as a problem. Something that could be made better, but we wouldn't know what it feels like. We catch a glimpse of it every second of our life, but we don't know what to do. We look at it isolated and afraid, and turn back to what has been made comfortable for us. We are slaves. Freedom is right in front of our eyes and we aren't reaching out.*

*There's a community out there waiting for us. It is hurting by our pain, because our pain is draining its very soul and life sources. Our desperation and search for perfection is bleeding this planet and ourselves dry.*

*We are tired, we are scared and we are very, very angry. We want more than anything to reach out to the person on the edge and to fly with them beyond the realms of our techno-industrial nightmare. We*

*keep waiting, and saying, “any minute now it’ll get better.” The exit doors are right there on the side of the screen; all we have to do is stop waiting for perfection and stand up and walk away.*

This is the other dimension that opens up at the breaking point. This is the most important moment in your life, because now more than ever it is easier to say ”not another day” with all your heart, soul, and being and mean it.

*We are raging inside, we are so wound up that we die of stress before we pour out and hold the person sitting next to us. We keep telling ourselves that we can’t go there, but we can. The door is wide open, the totality is internalized, and liberation starts from the inside out.*

Act on your rage and your love, there is peace only in imperfection. Letting go of control is the greatest joy in the world, and there is no better time than now.

*It’s not enough to say we’re sorry anymore.*

*Every day that civilization goes forth on its journey is more time lost. There is too much at stake. Every pill that is popped, every second worth of smoke, every mile that is driven, every second a body is preserved on a machine, every animal in a cage, every new link on the chain, every bit of progress, is taking us a giant leap towards a dead end.*

*It’s time for us to say, “not another minute!”*

*Now let’s find our home again.*

2001



# The Failure of Revolution





# Agents of Change: Primal War and the Collapse of Civilization

*Civilization has emerged only recently...and it may yet prove to be an unsuccessful experiment.*

- Roy Rappaport

I have to be honest. I fear the collapse of civilization. Things are going to get much worse before they get better. There will be no happy ending for civilization and no glorious day when we all chose to abandon it. The realization that we've passed the point of no return will be a shock when it finally hits us.

And that time is coming. Very soon.

I fear the collapse of civilization, but I work to make it happen as quickly as possible. Though I want to live without civilization, I know there is a large chance that I won't survive the collapse. But I know one thing: the longer we wait to bring this down; the worse off things are going to get. The one thing I fear more than the peak of the collapse is the state of the world if civilization does not collapse soon.

We need to talk honestly about the collapse of civilization because it is something that affects us. And even more so, it will become the baseline for coming generations.

Coming to terms with the collapse means we have to remember that life is about something bigger than ourselves. We are a part of the world around us and are inseparable from it. That is something that the civilizers know we must not remember. That is why we can make decisions that seriously threaten life in order to keep short-

term comforts. We simply don't care about what happens outside the very limited being that encompasses "me."

The consequences of this way of thinking and being are quickly becoming more apparent. Because of this, we're seeing a lot more talk about collapse in the mainstream. There's a flood of books and media about the collapse of civilizations and our ecological crisis. But they're there because they are filtered. They can, at times, carry a harsh critique of civilization, but the implicit warning is turned into a boast of our own ingenuity and ability to outsmart the natural world and past civilizations. We are heirs to a mighty empire that shall not suffer the past.

If only we can recycle more, consume less, become less dependent upon oil, and be nicer to each other. If only we drove hybrids and researched hydrogen, or utilized sunlight and wind as power. If only we could save the civilization we've worked so hard to achieve. If only we could hold onto Mozart, Picasso, wine and cheese, and not the bomb. We're full of hope. But hope alone never saved a civilization in the past. Hope alone never will.

We miss the basic message: what goes up must come down. Civilization is built and maintained by the domestication of wildness. That is, by turning full ecosystems into a synthetic power source for the supposed benefit of one section of one species. We've ignored something important, the ecological reality that we call carrying capacity and the consequence of ignoring it: collapse.

Carrying capacity is, in the crudest sense, how much life an ecosystem can sustainably support. That's something that comes from thousands and millions of years of evolutionary trial and error. Every bit of life in a given ecosystem has its part to play. Everything does. Fulfilling that place, or niche, is a part of the being of that life form. We shape each other's reality through all of our actions. That includes humans.

Being a part of community is important. But we've forgotten that. Hiding behind locked doors, afraid of everyone around us, and spending the bulk of our lives within boxes keeps us from remembering this. Living off of fields of crops and in closed off villages helps us forget it all just the same.

Few animals have ever been in the position to forget this, namely just the one (us), but occasionally they too overstep their place in a community. What happens is what sociologist William

Catton calls overshoot. This means that a species or society takes more than it gives: it oversteps its carrying capacity. This leads to an imbalance, albeit a temporary one. An ecological imbalance is nothing minor. In a tight knit community, stress in one area sends stress through the entire community. But carrying capacity is not a concept, chart, or theory, it is a narrow concept for ecological reality, so you can only step beyond it so far. What these moments are is a brief flare up of one species expanding at the cost of another until it can no longer support that excess. At that point, there is no choice or other option: the situation normalizes itself and things go on as they were.

What goes up must come down.

Civilization is different. Societies didn't just extend carrying capacity in a brief flare. They found a loophole: they rearranged the community. The reality is the same. Domesticated plants and animals replace wildness. The settled villages replace the wild communities they clear. The community is stressed. Things are no different, but domestication offered a chance to challenge carrying capacity for a longer period.

I say longer intentionally. As much as we've tried to convince ourselves that our larger brains and god/s have given us some great ability or predetermined destiny, we are not outside of the wildness we are a part of. That is true on individual, community, and nation-state levels. We are born to be wild. But we've stopped acting this way. And like all things, there are consequences.

On a longer timeline, our overshoot will still be a flare. But the further we go, the larger our flare, and the harsher the fall will be. This is something larger than a flare. This is collapse.

Though it has become more popular to talk about collapse these days, there isn't really a clear understanding of what collapse means. Most people have the idea that one day we'll wake up and the power won't be on. To them, that is collapse: an instant transformation. But there is no reality to that idea. Though we will all likely wake up one day with no electricity, or on and off over a period of months (sure enough, there are enough places in the world where that has long been the case): the true collapse will be far less fantastic.

Collapse is a process, not a moment or event. It can drag on or it can happen relatively quickly. The speed is directly relative to the rate a society has overstepped its place. In social terms, collapse refers to a massive reduction or simplification of society.

Stratification, specialization, bureaucracy, methods of statist control, the arts, economic coordination and organization, population, and networks of distribution will all be significantly simplified. Large-scale society breaks down into smaller, more self-sufficient ones. In ecological terms, the environment that a society is maintained off will simply no longer support it any more. In individual terms, the benefits of supporting and working for a society aren't worth the costs.

Collapse affects every part of society. It is social, ecological, psychological, political, economical, and theological in nature. On the periphery of society, it looks like days spent tilling fields where the soil is so thinned and damaged that it washes away, clogging the waterways in the process. It looks like increasing demands to feed a distant population. It looks like the youth being pulled into armies to raid and conquer on the forefront of a desperate and starving society and militarized forces moving into the towns, villages, or cities to keep order among the desperate and starving.

In the periphery and the towns it may look like a massive turn to god/s for help. In the towns, the politicians scramble to try and squeeze their grasp on power. It may look like a looming revolution or a totalitarian iron fist. Or both. The gap between the elites and the commoners becomes clearer. The health costs of having food that is more filler than nutritious and having even less of it increase. It looks like diseases and epidemics and pointed fingers. The others are to blame or the anti-social individuals. It may be the height of war or mob-style justice.

Or it might look like the height of empire. The worldview of the elites will always refuse to recognize its own end. The literate elites of fallen civilizations rarely record their own demise. Not necessarily because they don't want it to be known, but because they are incapable of seeing it. In the linear world, progress always moves forward. Societies flourish, not fall. That is what they think until the very end.

And we are no different. The environment is no longer willing to support the society that will destroy it given the chance. Collapse is not something that is going to happen to us. Collapse is something that is happening. Collapse is something that has been happening.

What we are seeing now is the peak.

That we don't see the reality of our created and sustained collapse

doesn't mean it's not happening. Things are different now. Every civilization that has existed prior has collapsed ahead of or into ours. Every collapse is relatively similar. But ours is different.

For the Anasazi and Chacoan civilizations of the American southwest, the peak of their collapse followed the refusal of the farmers to tolerate the tightening grasp of the elites. The same happened from site to site as the classic Mayan civilizations died off. The worldview arising from temples has captured the imagination of our modern society, but their architects didn't live to see that later Mayan descendants passing through used the once mighty thrones of kings as toilets. No doubt, we tend to miss the humor in it. In pre-conquest North America, you can see this happening over and over again: Cahokia, Hopewell, Hohokam, Inca, throughout the Eastern Woodlands and the Mississippi Valley. You see a society that settles down and over the centuries gardens turn to fields, the forests are cleared as waterways and roads are built as great mounds and temples are built.

And every time, it catches back up. Society pushes too far and collapses. The closer the people are to the earth and their own wildness, the easier it is to return. Sometimes societies try civilization again. So you have small and large flares.

But, sooner or later, it always catches back up.

This isn't what collapse has always looked like. Our globalized civilization has its roots in what is now a part of the Middle East, but once was called Mesopotamia. What once was considered the Fertile Crescent. Here you get the same thing: settlements, growth, deforestation, warfare, expansion, and collapse. But collapse here was different. Here civilization is not such an isolated thing, it was a place of multiple civilizations and a wider range of lands and people to take over. The collapse and complete reduction of one civilization was at the expanse of another.

The collapse of the Ottoman, Roman, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and other early Eurasian civilizations was the conquering of one empire by another. Civilizations swallowed each other, all with their own past, present, and future. Warfare, conquest, and colonization are as vital to this momentum as fields and forests.

Just the same, globalization has been its savior. Without the "discovery" of central to southern Africa, the Americas, and the South Pacific Islands, this beast would have consumed itself long ago. Instead it has moved from Eurasia across the planet.

Our planet.

Our home.

But to the civilizers, our planet is a dead place. To them, it is our resource. The survival of this civilization comes at the cost of all other life. Linear vision has a hard time understanding the true meaning of long-term loss. What has happened is that this civilization has spread itself across the entire planet. Now there is nowhere left to turn. There are no discoveries left. There are no civilizations left. Only one civilization: spread across the planet, organized and run by electronic surveillance, distribution, production, communication, and control. After being worked for centuries, fields turned to deserts; new forests and plains were cleared. As trees were cut, people started digging for new sources of energy. As that started to run low and be less useful, the civilizers started cutting apart the building blocks of life, on a molecular level, making both energy sources and bombs. As wildness runs slim, the synthetic landscape and society takes its place.

We've spread ourselves far and wide. We've spread ourselves thin.

It may be one of the greatest ironies that the most powerful civilization to have ever existed is also the most vulnerable. The civilizations that it is comprised of were saved by places to expand and exploit. Ours, fortunately, is not so lucky.

The consequences of a 10,000-year legacy of destruction are catching up.

And those consequences are catching up quickly. Very quickly.

Since the Mesopotamians first expanded their own reach, this civilization has been on borrowed time. It has been saved time and time again by new methods of expanding and toying with carrying capacity. Unlike isolated places, such as Easter Island where civilization grew slowly and died off rapidly, this civilization had somewhere new to move. Each time, there was some new place to exploit.

That is what has built this civilization and its worldview. The civilizers with their shallow history have mistaken luck for normality. As new places on this planet run out, they've turned more literally than ever before to what was once considered the heavens. The civilizers are no more prepared now than those before them to recognize the reality that they continue to recreate is finite.

We know for the civilizations that had left written records that they too weren't seeing the end of their days. We know that even when there was no question that the unending warfare and civil unrest and scapegoat persecutions were all a part of an unraveling empire, those in power refused to see it.

They could not see it.

They could not think that everything they had worked for was coming undone before their eyes. They could not see that their perpetual growth and progression was impossible. They could not see it when it was happening.

Just the same, we aren't seeing it happening. We can't even think of it.

I often wonder how everyone outside the elites viewed collapse. It seems that most often the farmers who were feeding the growing settlements simply didn't see the benefit anymore and the elites and their troops could no longer force them. They simply left. Those closest to the Earth, the tillers of the Earth's flesh, could see what was happening. There was no question that they weren't getting as much out as they put in. They saw the layers of topsoil wash off into waterways. They saw the sun drying out the earth exposed after the forests were cut. They saw that the storage houses weren't being filled while they worked harder and faced harsher treatment. They could see a catastrophe that was coming from either the natural world or a spiritual one.

But either way, they could see the end days of that civilization.

They saw this and they walked away, often with a violent resignation. And with this, the fragile house of cards came falling down.

There were always those who could see from the start what was happening. There were always those who could see that the environment was changing. There were those who could see that relationships were changing. There were those who realized this was a result of a synthetized relationship to the world and those who could only see it as the result of specific consequences within that society. So you get witch-hunts, you get persecution, you get genocide, you get warfare, and you get new legislation and powers.

The grasp of power always tightens the most when it is the weakest.

But we can't see the true irony here. We get used to looking forward,

looking towards the sky, we create god and then we spend the rest of our time trying to become it. We don't look down. We don't look inward.

Look back at the origins and spread of civilization. You start with settlements where populations expand. Wild seeds are brought into domesticated gardens. Domesticated gardens turn to fields of crops. Wild animals are herded and bred into stock animals. Villages turn to cities. Shamans turn to priests. Chiefs turn to kings. Open settlements turn into forts. You get cores, you get peripheries. You get elites and producers. You get those in between. You get armies and police. You expand and colonize. You get slaves and masters, workers and bosses.

It doesn't always happen like this. Many societies are content to stick with gardens, villages, shamans, chiefs, and a certain level of warfare. This way of living can remain relatively egalitarian and relatively sustainable for some time. But it has happened like this. Our reality is testament to this. Growth, left unchecked, leads only to more growth. And growth is an endemic disease.

At first only a small number of these societies existed. But they grew. They ran into each other violently and swallowed each other. They spread throughout the world. They became one. They became us. They grew so they could no longer sustain themselves. They needed food, fuel, water, and labor. They cut the forests, they pulled up the coal, they cut open atoms, they pulled up oil and natural gases, they tapped underground reservoirs, and they dammed rivers, and took the rays of the sun. They act like they could do this forever.

We act like we can do this forever.

Those who have always seen the problems with this anti-life of growth have always resisted it. They fought and were fought against. They still fight. They have nothing to lose because without their world, they are nothing. They are those who never forgot what it means to be human. They are those who never forgot what it means to be an animal. And for this, they are ignored and slaughtered. I don't doubt that they ever saw the plague and fall of past civilizations any less than they do now. I don't doubt that these "savages" were pushed aside any less before than they are now.

I'm left wondering how many of those past civilizations had people like M. King Hubbert. Technocrats and composers of a synthetic reality who saw a fatal flaw and could point it out in the

only way technocrats can understand it: the language of efficiency. In 1949, Hubbert realized that the world peak in oil production was coming rather quickly. He wasn't the first to notice, but he was one of the first to be taken seriously.

At least to be taken somewhat seriously.

Hubbert knew that his findings weren't just a figure, but potentially the looming end of the world as we've made it over the last few centuries. The global civilization, carried and maintained by an extensive technological and industrial framework, could not survive without a major source of energy. And probably could not survive if that source of energy wasn't cheap enough.

Perhaps in the 1950s it was easier to think that this would simply disable the last few centuries of progress and growth. I have serious doubts that this was the case. Continued progress and growth have only amplified the outcome: we have torn down and replaced the earlier stages of our civilization. They've become obsolete. We are no longer adding to past technological progress: we are replacing and erasing both the tools and the knowledge necessary to downscale. The future of civilization is dependent upon one thing: another source of cheap energy. It is dependent on moving forward, not back.

It is looking far less likely that a knight in shining armor will come to the rescue. There isn't much time. Contemporaries of Hubbert have continued both his work and his search for an alternative. One in particular, Colin Campbell, gave a timeline. By his findings, the best-case scenario is a sharp peak in world oil production around 2015-2020. The worst-case scenario is that the peak happened nearly ten years ago. So even under the best-case scenario, there would have to be a massive change over in the next decade for this system to survive.

Of course, this begs the question: is this survival or just more borrowed time? It is inevitable that civilizations will continually outgrow themselves. Perhaps the only relevant question left is what will be left when they can't carry on? What has gone up even farther can only look forward to a harsher fall.

As the end of cheap oil flies back at us, the question that is being asked is if we should drawdown our technology and downscale society or what the alternative energy will be? Not many people are really jumping ship. At least not yet. It's not discussed that neither of these choices is really a realistic option nor that they are desirable

ones. Hubbert and his followers point towards nuclear power as one of the best prospects for alternatives. It may be the only realistic one, but I'd hope more people are able to recognize that it also amplifies the worst-case scenario of civilization's crash in multitudes.

The civilizers have yet to come to terms with the fact that civilization has and will continue to outgrow itself. Any alternative will eventually run out of options, just as all the past ones have. There will be more people, fields will continue to produce less, the quality of crops will continue to decrease, the overcrowding of cities will continue, the need for more and more energy will not end. This is what our glorious future has to offer: more of the same, but always worse than before.

And we've not yet learned to distrust the technocrats. They said DDT was safe. They said lead paint was safe. They say work and growth are good. They say pesticides and insecticides are not harmful. They say nuclear power is safe. They say technology is safe when handled correctly. They say technology can be used correctly. They say a massive arms build up will keep us safe. They say an offensive defense is better than a defensive offense.

And what have we gained? Physical and emotional disease, social upheaval, psychologically unfulfilling lives, and a bunch of self-depleting junk. Perhaps we should start asking what we've lost instead.

And more importantly, we should be asking what we have to gain.

The peak in world oil production, though extremely significant, does not alone cause collapse. Hitting the peak in world oil production does not mean that global civilization will immediately fall apart and be done with. As I said earlier, collapse is about a process. The peak in oil production is only a factor in that timeline. The end of this society is much more complicated than this alone.

What the end of the era of cheap and widely available oil does mean is that society has become more vulnerable. I say more vulnerable intentionally. The nomadic hunter-gatherer life that we are born for is successful for one primary reason: it is adaptable. The more options you have and the less baggage you have to keep you from moving on or working with others, the better your chances of success. All the same, horticultural (gardening) societies are more successful than agricultural (field farming) societies because of

their relative diversity and ability to trek when necessary.

Disaster, as we know it, is a direct consequence of settlements. Droughts happen. Other plants and animals have cycles of bust and boom. Hunting isn't always successful. There are plenty of ways that the day-to-day life of a nomadic hunter-gatherer can be inconvenienced, but none of them are so tragic. You can always move or join up with other bands or eat different foods. If you see early warning signs of severe weather, you can respond quicker. As the recent tsunamis throughout Southeast Asia left a death toll of over a quarter of a million, the gathering and hunting peoples of the Andaman Islands, like all wild beings, knew what was coming ahead of time and responded appropriately.

These same peoples, who have evaded expanding Indian rule for centuries now, were capable of understanding the world around them and accepting what they saw. They were capable of responding. The would-be and current colonizing forces have always said that the rule of civilization is inevitable. They're probably not noticing the irony that this kind of event offers.

Weather like this is something that has always happened. It has toppled civilizations before, but not by itself. Settlements make society more vulnerable. Being dependent on certain crops makes society more vulnerable. Having a large population that is not directly involved in basic subsistence activity makes a society vulnerable. A society having overused a great deal of farmland and running low on sources of energy makes a society vulnerable. All of these things, taken on their own, are very serious in their implications for a society.

A civilization is likely to endure hardship in any one of these areas. Politicians can maneuver their way through drought and maintain order. Just the same, they can handle a large population that has no idea of how to feed themselves. A great loss of lives to a natural disaster or great deal of structural damage can be dealt with.

But when they are combined, any one of these could simply be a trigger.

This is what we need to understand: our global civilization is spreading itself out thinly across the planet. Because of its ultra-exploitative nature, it is vulnerable in nearly every conceivable aspect. We can't see that now. We look out to a world ordered and driven by civilized and technological manipulation. We see a world where politicians can see and hear everything we say, do,

and, possibly, think. While power has never been so strong and so consolidated, it has also never been so weak in so many places and so completely susceptible to being disabled if only we were to exploit those weaknesses.

In reality, civilization has bred the conditions for its own demise.

The same technology that makes it possible to create a global economy and spread production throughout the world makes it weak. Only a handful of crops serve as the bulk of the world's food supply. As we've seen in the last few years, such selective breeding and expansive trade networks makes them vulnerable. We almost lost the banana last year to a single blight. The Irish potato famine may prove to be a tiny version of things to come.

All major and minor crops are at risk, just as major and minor fuel sources are. Now, we can overlook these things because it wouldn't be hard for most of us to live without bananas. So we think it wouldn't impact us so much. But the people who make our world possible throughout the global production network aren't so fortunate. And when they lose, we lose. The precious empire of crap will fall when no one is there to carry it forward. I know it's hard, but let's not overlook the sheer loss of life that comes with this sort of thing.

This is just one example. Anywhere we look, we will find more.

Fish and other ocean life are a staple food for a vast chunk of the worlds' population. Over-fishing and waste from selective fishing have caused some of the most significant loss of life on the planet. By now we should all be at least somewhat aware of the consequences of deforestation. With no trees and no healthy ecosystems, the soil dries up in the sun and washes into rivers, lakes and oceans carrying all the synthetic fertilizers that were supposed to cover up the loss with it. We lose plants: we lose oxygen. We lose oxygen, we can't breathe.

We have to start noticing this because we share this land with trees. What we aren't seeing is the loss of life in the oceans that is just as absolutely necessary to life on this planet as the forests. The bulk of the world's coral reef is dying or very close to it. Our economic vision doesn't understand ecological reality. Ecosystems don't work like markets: you can't lose in one area and make up for it in another. You can't lose coral reef and replace it with something new, something farmed, or something entirely synthetic. Healthy

ecosystems need a real balance: one that cannot be easily or materially reproduced.

And, unlike the markets, running one business dry doesn't lead to an immediate crash. The earth doesn't work like that. By our standards, it happens slowly. So we can go on ignoring it, just like we ignored cancer from DDT, nuclear waste, lead, and the like. By the time we notice, it's too late to do anything about it.

That is, it's too late to do anything but to stop destroying life and try to learn how to live again. Unfortunately, the stubbornness and determination that we're so proud of keeps us from learning lessons. We're too proud to look at the coral reefs to see what we are doing wrong.

Like past civilizations, we will one day learn that lament and regret won't redeem us. Only action will.

Learning that we can't live without forests, without coral reef, without wild fish populations, or that we can live with lead, oil and coal mining, electricity, and DDT doesn't mean that we can find a way out of this mess without changing to the core. Understanding these things and the fragility of the world we create and maintain daily can only lead to a completely different approach to how we live, see, and think about the world around us. Faced with a world of diseases, of destruction continually amplified by technological progress, of depression and deprivation, we must come to understand that civilization, with all of its concrete and mental institutions, cannot continue.

The collapse of our global civilization is inevitable. Theories point out that we've passed the peak or are going to very soon and argue for a long and dragging demise or a quick one. But even the most pessimistic account rarely notices the fact that the greatest shake-ups typically come from those vulnerable areas that we least expect.

And most of us forget that one of those vulnerable areas is us: the civilized, the humans. Our own self-domestication has not changed who we are. What we eat, the way we live, the chemicals we've been breathing, eating, and wrapping ourselves in have all affected us seriously, but for the most part, our bodies and minds have not changed. Every child is born ready for the world of the hunter-gatherer.

We are still animals. We are still a part of the natural world. We are still apart of natural ecosystems. That psychological split that has

been instilled in us—the human “us” versus the wild “them”—keeps us from realizing this, but it is no less true that when talking about ecological reasons for collapse we’re still talking about ourselves. This is the part we’ve forgotten.

Past civilizations have gone through the long, drawn out process of collapse. They have been stressed, have warred, have turned against each other, have sacrificed themselves, have prayed and preyed, or simply ignored the end of the world they created.

But the death of civilization is not some wholly external thing. Yet that’s the only way we’re usually allowed to imagine it, and it’s a popular way. We see the end of our world as a battle between God and Satan over human souls and a division between heaven and hell. Nearly every society that has challenged carrying capacity and faces an inevitable collapse of their system has to create two new myths: their origins and their demise. Both always come at the hands of the gods.

These are important stories and interpretations of reality. They not only set the tone for seeing humans and even particular societies as removed from the rest of life, they set the tone for that progressing worldview. They set the cornerstone for linear and historical thought. For the first time, there is a beginning and an end. This is life, spread out on a line and isolated. History and heritage become important. Sacrifice, most often taking the form of work, becomes a virtue.

What is most important for us here is the realization that the more a society becomes distanced from the natural world, the more distant their god/s become. The more distant their god/s become, the more external their reality. What you end with is simple: change is out of our hands; the most we can do is pay taxes or tribute and live moral lives. We look to our own legacy in the space of theirs: History. The line replaces the circle in reality and in thought.

When we accept that the creators and programmers of our lives and our reality are out of our reach, we surrender our responsibility and our agency. We can no longer change things. Civilization becomes just as external as the god/s who crafted it. It is something happening to us rather than something that we create and maintain. Something that will end, but not something we can end. Here the domesticators really know what they’re doing: they’ve instilled helplessness into our pathology.

We can accept the end of our world, so long as it is god/s taking

back what they started. We can say and do nothing, but concern ourselves with living in a moral manner. We concern ourselves with our personal and isolated lives while ignoring the death of the natural world and the decay of our being. We ignore our own agency in the collapse of civilization.

No matter what we do, no matter how much we're trying to save civilization or drag out the process of collapse, we are contributing to the collapse of civilization. But this is not always in a very preferable way. We do it by living as a part of this self-destructive system and continually denying our own wildness, or we give into our animality, our wildness, and do something about it. I consider this taking part in the primal war: the refusal and resistance to domestication wherever and whenever it has imposed itself on life and the world.

No matter what our choice is, we are destroying civilization. Our choice is really about whether that role is active or passive. Our choice is about the world we live in and the world we want to live in. Our choice is about how and when we're going to get there.

When civilizations collapsed in the past, there were most often periods of horrible blight. People tend to tolerate a lot when they're incapable of seeing what direction they are heading. You get famine, war, desperation, starvation, and just about everything else we see as social ills. The gap between the socio-political haves and have-nots is at a peak. And in this peak of despair, through the war, bloodshed, and finger pointing, those that have not killed each other simply walk away.

At some point, people recognize that civilization is not something external to their reality. The hegemonic grasp of the elites erodes in the face of hunger and intolerable oppression. Like the old saying goes: the boss needs us, we don't need the boss. But we can apply that more widely: replace boss with machine, fields, work, god/s, economy, politics, or civilization. We've lived without all of these things and we don't need them. They are killing us. The city and the countryside stand between us and a society that is capable of supporting the next generations. Work stands between life and us. Progress stands between a healthy, livable world and a suffocating one. Those who built the temples of god-kings, those who filled the granaries, those who worked in the fields, those who built roads, cut forests, those who crushed opposition; all of them hit a point when it was painfully obvious that they were putting far

more into the system than they were getting in return.

Most of them always knew this. Just like most of us still know this. But what is different is that they realized they could do something about it. Tired of waiting for divine intervention, they stopped civilization. Whether it was through killing elites, sabotaging tools, burning granaries, homes and temples, symbolic destruction, ignoring or torching the fields, or simply stopping production through walking away: they took back their agency. They stopped believing that they needed the system like it needed them. They resisted and hit power where it hurts: they rendered it useless.

I think the last point is the most important one. There has never been a revolution against civilization, and if there were, it's not likely that it would be successful. Revolutions are limiting. They seek to make great changes, but both in historical and practical senses they take a certain shape, form, and target. To take on the system, revolutionaries take up that same form, not necessarily of will, but because it is the only thing that they know and because the only way they know how to attack is on the State's terms.

In short, revolutions always become political rather than anti-political. Politics is messy. You can't talk about politics without using the political-legalese and logic. It is a worldview that takes hierarchy, power, and bureaucracy as a fact of life. And the revolutionaries end up taking it in. You get specialists, divisions, leadership (in the form of positions of power or influence), and you get armies. That is because revolutions aim at overtaking a certain system or source of power. They need something simple to get people to join their ranks, to throw their lives on the line, and to get people to come together for one target and many offenses. If you want to take power on, you need a revolution.

But if you want to take power out, then you need something different.

I talk about the war being waged against domestication since it first came about. This is another part of the primal war. It's a war without magnificent battlefields and victories, but a war that is waged through the existence of an imposing order. This war is based not off of ideals about how things could be, but an understanding of how things are. Specifically, it is about an understanding of the wildness within and around us. It is about understanding what the domesticators fear so much and try to take from us. It is about

taking that wildness back.

Primal war takes resistance and rewilding to be one in the same. There is no platform or proper path; there is no set goal that each individual must achieve. There is no organization, politics, economics, and the like. It looks like people breaking mediation and connecting on their own terms. It can look like a group of people recreating community in the original sense. It can look like people digging up fiber optic cables or derailing trains carrying coal. Or it looks like bulldozers, earthmovers, strip malls, luxury homes, and logging equipment in flames. Or it looks like people learning about wild foods and primal lifeways, breaking their own dependency on civilization. Or it looks like the replanting of wild and native species with an understanding of what a healthy ecosystem is. And it is all of these things.

All of this is a part of taking our lives back.

Primal war is about breaking our dependency and taking back our agency. It is about understanding our role in a destructive and self-consuming civilization. It is about understanding the inevitable end that we are only making worse. It is about taking action and becoming agents of collapse in an active way.

This is something that is innately different from revolution by its very nature. It is anti-political in practice. Rather than attempting to take on civilization on its own terms, primal war takes an understanding of civilization and how it works to undermine and attack. It is about exploiting the weaknesses of the global empire. It is about dismantling power rather than seizing it. That may look like insurrections or it may look like people walking away from civilization. Or it may look like ELF-type arsons or armed attacks on key points on the electrical power grid that is the lifeblood of civilization. It takes active confrontation on every level and a refusal to passively sit back as civilization continues to destroy this planet, our home.

Revolutions have typically centered on a nihilistic urge to simply destroy the old system. More often than not, they've failed on this point. But the nihilistic urge to start over from nothing never goes deep enough. Rejecting everything never goes deep enough. It never leaves that individualism and egoistic worldview that the domesticators created to keep us as concerned taxpayers rather than conscious of the scale of our daily lives.

It doesn't break that self/other split that the domesticators

create. It tells us that we are external to the world. Its opposite, biocentrism, does the same thing. It reminds us that we are separate from a world and a wildness that is external to our being and far more important. In attacking that self/other split, primal war is really about an understanding and love of life and wildness. It is for something rather than simply against something. It is about something you can feel, see, and breathe, not just something that sounds nice. It's something that has worked for millions of years.

Primal war spreads from the rage that only a deep love creates. It is about a totalistic and relentless attack on the system that is killing us and our world for all that we can be separated. It demands action, but that is action that comes from within, not from leaders and platforms. It demands that we take the collapse of civilization seriously and take action to bring it on quicker while softening the impact of the crash.

I said from the start that I fear the collapse but I know it is something that is happening, something that must happen. But I don't want to give the impression that primal war is any kind of panacea or that it will make life easier or simply a safe place of refuge. There is no simple solution.

With a deep understanding of wildness comes a return to responsibility. Civilized living is about distancing ourselves from the consequences of our actions. We don't have to see where our trash goes, where our clothes and other crap are made, where our food and fuel comes from. But a world without civilization, a world without a global technological network, is a world where consequences are not something distant. We have to readjust our thought and action to the community level in ecological and social terms.

That takes some serious work.

Walking away doesn't erase the impact of any civilization. It never has. Some civilizations have permanently changed the regional ecosystems in negative ways far more than others, but on a long enough time line, this is always temporary. Waterways, walls, homes, and temples will be grown over. Even the huge temples of the classic Maya were so overgrown that the first colonizing Europeans hardly noticed them.

However, no past civilization had concrete, machines, and nuclear power anymore than they had electronic surveillance and

guns. There is no historical precedent for collapse on the scale of our own. Our own collapse is like all the past ones, but amplified to scale, a point that can't be overstated. We will, in time, readjust as a species. We're adaptive and, hopefully, capable of learning from our past.

The immediate period requires a lot more consciousness raising and a lot of concrete razing. There is work to be done everywhere. We should be conscious of what areas of civilization are going to affect us the most a hundred, thousand, or million years from now. Is there some way to more safely shut off nuclear power plants and keep them shut off?

The concrete, steel, and glass will always be an issue, but it's one I'm actually a bit less concerned about. The bulk of civilized work is busy work. I'd say even with our proud and ingenious civilization, nearly all work done is maintenance work. The roads always have to be redone, cracks have to be filled, walls needed painted, fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides need spread, the lawn needs mowed, and the leaves raked. Pushing aside wildness is a daily chore; actually, it's pretty much everyone's full-time job. It's weeding the garden. The willingness of life and wildness to continue existing will always be stronger than the ability of concrete to last. It has no life and no purpose aside from what we give it. It will fade in time. The frailty of the world that domestication has built is something we can see daily.

The reminder of which will last the longest, in tiny fragments of plastic diluting and polluting the entirety of the world for hundreds or thousands of years to come.

There is a concern over the sheer loss of wild life and wild places. There are far fewer places for us to return to, that much is true. This is usually taken as an argument against collapse and for either reforming civilization or taking steps through civilization for a 'soft landing' rather than a crash. The books flooding the public consciousness on collapse all push for the latter, but there is very little reality to back up such a pipe dream were it even socially possible. What it would look like is more of the same, but with an even larger gap between the rich and the poor. Look at the life of luxury that the rich have built; you think they'll give up golf courses and mansions out of good will for the earth or even their children?

But the earth is strong. Wildness is strong. The only thing holding it back is us. Left untended, healthy ecosystems will return.

Granted it will take some time and readjustment, but probably far less than what we would be led to believe.

If you look at fields left fallow, you can see how quickly new life emerges. The forests that are left are always trying to spread beyond the lines we place before and around them. Invasive species drown them out, but those invasive species are only a piece of a larger picture. Invasive species are like the civilizations that breed them. They are plants and animals that feed off of disturbed areas. They are the uninvited guests of the first gardens and have spread through a world where once healthy ecosystems are torn apart and left in shambles. When the disturbance ends, their role as the persistent wave of wildness displaced, yet struggling, will only become more apparent. Ceasing some semblance of ecological restoration has nothing on the impact that no longer inflicting the wounds of industrial strength control bring. The Earth may not be able to fully endure another 10, 20, 100 years of industrial civilization, but the Earth is strong enough for this.

And it can always use help. We can learn about the native ecosystems and their interconnections. We should never think we are capable of redoing what the earth shaped over millions of years. We can do our best to try and reintroduce and spread native seeds back into their niche.

This demands a trust and respect for life that we have lost to short-term vision. And this is where the critique of domestication really hits home: what does this all mean in terms of personal action? We've never really had a hard time understanding that the wild animals around us rarely have a hard time seeking out food in the forest. But when it comes to us, it's almost impossible to imagine. We're incapable of seeing beyond the garden. So we beg the question: is a nomadic hunter-gatherer life preferable or feasible over a return to small-scale horticulture? To both, I'd say yes.

Nomadism is what has shaped our reality. It is what a lived ecology looks like. Horticultural societies, compared to agricultural and, especially, industrialized agrarian societies, are relatively sustainable. I have no innate opposition to them and no lack of solidarity with such struggling peoples. But if we're talking about the steps we are to take in our own lives, I see a nomadic or semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer life as the most ideal. Considering the kind of transitional stages that wild and feral places are going to have to go through, sedentism would amount to suicide. It simply lacks the

adaptivity that a nomadic life carries. It keeps us from overrunning areas or depleting all life in any particular area. It keeps our social life moving and allows us to split off to keep tensions low. It breaks the possibility for our obsession with property, possessions, and nationalism. It is and always has been a breeding ground for our primal anarchy.

And it places wildness over the domesticated.

It places the forest before the garden. That requires more knowledge and more effort on our own part, but, most of all, it requires us to once again trust wildness and learn to live without fear of a dark and looming future and without the need to meet the expectations of history. It requires a return to the moment so that there may be a future. The garden is a short-term solution. It keeps us settled and, theoretically, better protected from the changes that come with the seasons.

But it keeps us tamed. While not every wild plant or animal serves us the same as crops like tomatoes, potatoes, and beans, we have to understand the importance of an entire ecosystem versus selected plants solely for our own good. Gardens make us more vulnerable. And vulnerability has always led to the ills of horticultural societies: a tendency towards patriarchy, warfare, the roots of coercive power, stricter social regulation, the potential for poverty and catastrophe, and less social flexibility.

Of course, these are things that have become core parts of horticultural societies and things they are all more than happy to have in their lives. At the same time, they are almost all identifying aspects of horticultural life. While many of us might not see them as preferable, we'd be arrogant to think these wouldn't arise again in the societies we ourselves may begin to shape. That comes back to our short-term thinking. In our lives and our children's lives these may not be an issue, but societies are organic and tend to follow the same flow in the same circumstances. Either way, a horticultural society that we create now, by its nature, will either be far stricter socially and less prone to individual expression and discovery, or it will look like nearly every other horticultural society to have existed.

Or the opposite is true. The short-term future will be the true tragedy. Those who benefit from keeping us afraid of each other and our own human nature have always told that without their power and control we would return to our "savage" nature: a world, in their

words, of murder, rape, and pillaging. There is no real grounding for this, but there is always the fear that some have actually instilled this Machiavellian drive for power. So there is the fear of the Mad Max post-collapse society. I have to be honest: it is possible. But in a world of nomadic hunter-gatherers, there is little left for these roaming bandits to loot and little to take over. With no basis for power and nothing left to exploit, they'll fade with the civilization that breeds them.

But where there are gardens, there are settled societies and therein lays the potential threat. When societies have settled, raids have always been both a threat and a reality. The granary and the storage house are still relatively new to humanity. They're not things we're accustomed to and they can be corrupting. We were never meant to deal with property and personal possessions as we've created with settled society. So long as these things exist, that manifested side of ourselves that our own psyches are incapable of predicting or controlling may arise.

I could always be very wrong. But our own history makes us far less predictable than some of us would like to believe. How future generations live will be based more upon how our societies exist rather than what we think they should look like. That is something we need to consider.

And that is also a practical concern. We need to be thinking about change in terms of generations rather than just ourselves. On a personal level, we could all go feral, but the true test of rewilding doesn't lie within ourselves and our own lives, it lies within the next generations. Some of the questions we need to be asking are about what we will teach them. How will they grow up? This is possibly where we have the most to learn from Indigenous societies. It means, at base, a return to wildness and a return to our own instincts. For the next generations, it becomes even clearer that a primary concern ought to be about rebuilding community and bringing civilization down sooner than later.

For any action we take, there will be consequences. If we remain passive or active, there will be consequences. There may not be much time to respond and there may be no real way of telling how much time there is. But we need to understand the reality that has been created, the reality that we continually recreate.

We need to understand what it is we've lost and what it is we

are losing. We need to do all of this, and we need to act. Whether or not we ever wanted to be in this position, whether or not we acknowledge it, this is our reality.

There is no promise of greatness. There is no delusion of a perfect world beyond the collapse. There is no easy solution. There is only us and the world we help to create.

The sooner we realize this, the better off we all are.  
Rewild. Resist.

No war but the primal war!

2005

### *Some Useful Sources*

John Bodley, *the Power of Scale: A Global History Approach*.

Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003. Excellent global overview of the connection between population size and political and ecological consequence. Like all of Bodley's books, focuses on the real impacts of growth in an accessible manner.

William Catton, *Overshoot: the Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982. This is a brilliant and unfortunately overlooked evaluation of the relationship between carrying capacity and the inevitable collapse of civilizations.

Tom Dale and Vernon Gill Carter, *Topsoil and Civilization*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955. Though long out of print, the influence of this book has been profound. It looks at the ecological impact of civilizations and how the growth of society ends in the abuse and overuse of the land base it grows from leading to collapse.

Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: the Fates of Human Societies*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. Very popular book looking at various human societies and what caused them to either 'succeed' or 'fail'.

Brian Fagan, *Floods, Famines and Emperors: El Nino and the Fate of Civilizations*. New York: Basic Books, 1999. Comparable to Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*, but focuses on the relationship between natural weather patterns and their

relationship to the collapse of civilizations.

Richard Heinberg, *The Party's Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2003. A recent overview of collapse and our social and ecological reality with some good coverage of theories on collapse with a realistic review of just what alternatives exist and if their inability to sustain technological, industrial civilization. Unfortunately, the real conclusions have been brushed aside by his far more reformist and passive follow up: *Drawdown*.

David Stuart, *Anasazi America*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000. An archeologist and anthropologist in career, Stuart offers an extremely readable and human understanding of Anasazi society and its collapse with constant connections to our own current situation.

Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. This is a very dense archeological overview of collapse and collapse theory, but a textbook on the subject. It has most of the shortcomings of specialized academic approaches and can be frustrating in its look at single cause theories regarding collapse, but Tainter's basic point is solid: marginal returns can be widely understood holistically in ecological, social, psychological, political, spiritual, and economic terms.

# Understanding Collapse

The topic of collapse has been subjected to numerous case studies and much theorizing within academia.

And rightfully so.

What is often apparent—though most often not said—is that a study of how past civilizations and empires have fallen also carries implications as to the fate of our own. Because of that fact, most of what has been produced has been extremely sanitized and safeguarded within the confines of ivory towers. Trying to really grasp the bulk of it is a rather tedious job. Regardless of the spin put on all of it, the facts really speak for themselves. What I hope to do here is to lay it out truthfully in the context of our own crisis and point towards the realization that one brave anthropologist, Roy Rappaport, dared to speak: “Civilization has emerged only recently...and it may yet prove to be an unsuccessful experiment.”<sup>1</sup>

In order to talk about collapse, historically and currently, it seems necessary to try and give it some contextual and historical definitions. The very word *collapse* tends to be an emotionally strong word, and in our time of increasing desperation, it carries a rather fatalistic overtone. Many people hear the word and immediately think about survivalists, those who are ready to jump ship and, in most cases, defend their remaining property to the very end of a Mad Max-esque climax. However, I know of collapse as the collapse of bodies, from constant work, from stress and from consuming everything over and under the counter to put that stress off for another moment: ushering in the chemically induced trance towards a paradise lost. I hear survivalist and I think of a system

which has bred us for nothing but the lowest level of “survival” as a substitute for life.

In all reality, collapse is not the kind of term that we usually think it is.

I’d say the thought of bodies collapsing is bringing it closer to home, but that too is still just a part of a much larger picture, one that we’ve been trained not to see. So long as we think of collapse in terms of some crazed militia folks in Michigan or some over-the-top ecologists or on that very personal level, we’re missing the connection that collapse is something very real and involving all of us, our home, our food, everything.

In the context of our time, our current age of mega-technological, industrial, consumer, globalized civilization, collapse is as much the death of healthy ecosystems as it is popping pills in front of sitcoms and the systematic denial of autonomy and self-determination. It is the destruction of our ability to follow dreams and connect with each other—that is, of course, without wires and microwaves—as our being is poured into the mold of linear rationality. We live, eat, sleep, and breathe the products of a civilization collapsing daily, but we don’t want to call it that. The reason is very simple: we are what we live, eat, sleep, and breathe, or at least we think we are.

This is the result of our domestication, the indoctrination of our souls. Domestication is a life long process that is set out to make us a part of this system, and, unfortunately, it has been rather successful. For most of us Westerners, it begins when we are born into a sterilized room, welcomed into the professionally caring, latex covered hands. It nurtures us through well-advertised, mechanically pre-digested foods, carrying us through years of education, and dumping our disembodied selves into the real world of work, bills, and—for those lucky few—retirement. It becomes an addiction, though we don’t see it, and, in straight terms, we can call it diversion.

How it works is simple, we focus on a point immediately before us and when anything more promising appears in the background it’s easier to stick with the less interesting thing before us than take the chance of failure to reach what it is we really want. This happens to us everyday and it’s become such a big thing that we’re actually shutting down emotionally to our own desires. That is domestication and that is how civilization works.

While it may initially appear to be a bit of a tangent, understanding domestication is central to understanding why collapse is such a taboo and distant subject. In trying to relay this topic, I keep thinking back to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's study on the Nazi Holocaust and modernity. In closing his study, he points out that in the face of a life or death situation, however unlikely the worst case scenario may be, civilized humans will rationalize the most ludicrous of atrocities in order to "save themselves."<sup>2</sup> The connecting line here is that having survival put before us doesn't seem so bad when the alternatives are matched with the likelihood of complete failure: meaning simply, that so long as the reality of collapse is somewhat removed, the more we become comfortable with settling for what we have right here and now and doing whatever possible to keep our minds within that perceived safety.

Collapse, as a concept and as a reality, remains so removed from our daily lives that it must be defined.

### *Defining Collapse*

My own interests in trying to come to terms with collapse have come up with one certainty: as with everything else, there is no pure or absolute definition of collapse.

There are probably as many theories of why civilizations or empires collapse as there are stars in the sky. Digging through them tends to give a clearer picture of why works on collapse rarely end on much solid ground for us. By the time most writers have gotten towards the end of their book, they've likely dug themselves deeper into the pit of eternal questioning. Another look at all the information and knowing what we're facing now shows that we don't exactly have the time to keep waiting for that perfect theory.

As with all sciences and theories, the work produced on collapse generally turns out to be monumental evidence supporting single claims of causation followed by hundreds of others attacking it in defense of their own theory. Fortunately for all you readers, you'll be spared the bulk of this here.

One thing that must be made clear is that collapse is not an event, but a process. Arguably it's just one part of a larger process of civilization's rise and fall. There is no discernible point when a civilization collapses, but a continuum. It is because of this that there are often theories that propose a single reason for the collapse.

I argue that ecological factors are the primary spark for the process, but that the “symptoms of collapse” are what ultimately complete the process.

Archaeologist Joseph Tainter has given what I see as one of the best understandings regarding collapse. According to him, collapse is characterized by:

- Lower degree of stratification
- Reduction in specialization
- Decentralization of control
- Lessening on the control of behavior
- Less interest/investment in architectural, artistic or literary fields
- Drop in the flow of information between political and economic groups, the core and periphery
- Lessened redistribution of resources
- Less overall coordination and organization among individuals and groups
- Integration of smaller areas into larger political groups<sup>3</sup>

Having laid out this extremely wide-ranging criteria, it seems necessary to try and pin it down a bit more for the purposes laid out here. Without completely turning on Tainter’s criteria, the most fundamental concept is an overall “simplification” of a given society. More or less, a larger political, economic, and social force has been dissolved, as has surely been the case for every instance of collapse.

What Tainter has laid out here seems to be a list of *possibilities* of collapsing or collapsed societies. To bring this back to where we are now and what we are facing, I should emphasize that there is a difference between what I see as historical cases of collapse and our own case. For example, when the Roman Empire finally collapsed, its former area of control was integrated into the emerging empires, becoming a case point for Tainter’s last qualification, as mentioned above. While this has certainly been the case for the bulk of the empires and civilizations looked at historically, it is hardly a likely case for the current Western civilization, which has essentially engulfed the entire planet.

So, for the most part, I’ll stick with Tainter’s qualifiers for collapse in regards to historical examples. But for looking at our own context, a fatal breakdown of the globally dependent network

that is civilization is the kind of collapse that we face.

### *The Study of Collapse*

My interests in collapse have come through my own experiences: any academic study came subsequently. My interest with this work is towards being an active agent in collapse rather than observer, which likely affects my approach. With that said, I think it's important to look at the history of collapse theory and debates, but I can't offer it in its entirety or in the kind of depth that I would like to. What follows is a rather topical overview and by all means incomplete, but enough to get some grounding.

There have largely been three primary camps for the study of collapse—historical, archaeological and social/ecological—though the separations may be very much arbitrary in most cases. The historical study is usually a part of the larger history of the rise and fall of civilizations. They are more or less the products of studying written and primarily Western history with collapse being relatively peripheral with noted exceptions. The two primary figures here, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee, are both known for their classic volumes—*the Decline of the West* and *A Study of History*, respectively—and have maintained high regard in the Western tradition, even despite the undeniable fascism of Spengler—an actual Nazi.<sup>4</sup>

The archaeological study is by far the most prolific of the bunch. It has produced the most extensive works on the matter and serves as the most valuable resource for in-depth study. Without this, our contextualization of collapse would be limited to the written words of collapsed empires and civilizations that would have left us very much in the dark as to all of what has happened. Joseph Tainter's *The Collapse of Complex Societies* stands out as one of the most important texts within this trend. The academic treatment is worthy in its clarity and depth, but it is also important to note that turning the subject of collapse into a field of study has often removed it from being contextualized within our own society. It is here that the social and ecological study fits in.

The social and ecological study has been a bit of an off and on phenomena for our society. A book that focuses on our ecological or social devastation is likely to peak in and out of mass consciousness. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is an example of this, but such books

as William Catton's *Overshoot* and Paul Elhrich's *Population Bomb* get the attention without the follow through. Books of this nature are often taken up as the basis for reform or they are pushed aside, often developing momentum within countercurrents. These books are most important because they speak directly to our own society and the urgency of actually *doing* something about it. That they are pushed aside is a part of our cultural denial and a sign of the relative privilege that we are granted. That privilege, however, does not make the problems go away.

### *The Historical Tradition*

Oswald Spengler is by far one of the most notorious and curious of world historians. His two-volume work, *The Decline of the West*, gained widespread readership and became the center of massive debate upon publication (1918 for Volume 1 and 1922 for Volume II). What is immediately striking in these texts is the tone of fatalism and fascism.

Spengler realized that "Faustian" (Western) Civilization would meet its inevitable end. Not only this, but Spengler challenged the general notion that civilization is a positive outcome of Progress. One of his biographers characterized his view of civilization as "externally oriented, inartistic, rootless, artificial, rationalistic, materialistic, decadent, and irreligious."<sup>5</sup> In Spengler's own words: civilizations "are a conclusion...death following life, rigidity following expansion...They are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again."<sup>6</sup>

Spengler was a determinist. Civilizations would inevitably rise and fall due to the nature of increasing complexity. His understanding for collapse is social in nature:

*In every Culture the quantum of work grows bigger and bigger till at the beginning of every Civilization we find an intensity of economic life, of which the tensions are often excessive and dangerous, and which it is impossible to maintain for a long period.<sup>7</sup>*

Though the collapse of our Faustian civilization would only be followed by another civilization in its wake, as Spengler saw it,<sup>8</sup> the boom and bust is seemingly a negative cycle that we are actors in.

What is most problematic with Spengler is that his view on what should be done was left along his ultra-nationalist concern for the fate of Germany. His greatest hope was for notoriety and attempting to “save his land.” His criticism of Weimar Germany caught him much negative attention from the likes of Hitler. His desires laid in grandeur and he would press for more colonization and imperialism, remaining true to his fascistic tendencies.

Despite this, he remains important to the study of collapse for his revelations, not his intentions. *Decline of the West* stands as a chronicle of the failures of civilizations. Norman Yoffee best summarizes my particular interest in Spengler’s contributions:

*Spengler was less interested in providing a “falsifiable” model for the rise and fall of civilizations than he was in noting that “Faustian” (i.e. Western European) civilization exhibited in the early twentieth century the same symptoms as other historic, declining cultures.<sup>9</sup>*

So while Spengler may not be quite as valuable for collapse theorists, his contributions are vital to connecting the fate of past civilizations with the fate of ours.

Just not for reasons he might have ever intended.

In contrast to Spengler is the widely renowned historian Arnold Toynbee.

Toynbee is responsible for his thirteen-volume masterpiece, *Study of History*, which stands among the most significant of world history reference books. Making a comparative study of twenty-one civilized societies, he “was concerned with formulating explicit and casual statements to account for the origin and collapse of civilizations.”<sup>10</sup> He was, more or less, a collapse-oriented historian.

Despite having written so extensively, it becomes harder to point towards a solid view on civilization and collapse in his work. Toynbee seems reluctant to have made the kind of connection of collapse in the historical sense to our own position. Yoffee notes that: “Toynbee seems to have thought that the breakdown of civilizations is not irreversible, *ancient* civilizations were caught in a historical web of inevitable collapse.”<sup>11</sup> Toynbee writes:

*It may be that Death the Leveler will lay his icy hand on our*

*civilization also. But we are not confronted with any Saeva Necessitas. The dead civilizations are not dead by fate, or ‘in the course of nature,’ and therefore our living civilization is not doomed inexorably in advance to ‘join the majority’ of its species.<sup>12</sup>*

Despite this optimistic tone, he undoubtedly had moments of little faith in the ability of our civilization to save itself. In correspondence with Spengler, he put hope in modernity, but still saw civilization as likely “failed experiment.”<sup>13</sup> In later works, he would take a more active voice in light of our grim circumstance:

*If mankind is going to run amok with atom bombs, I personally should look to the Pygmies of Central Africa to salvage some fraction of the present heritage of mankind.*

*...They might be able to give mankind a fresh start; and, though we should then have lost the achievements of the last 6000 to 10,000 years, what are 10,000 years to the 600,000 or a million years for which the human race has already been in existence?<sup>14</sup>*

The historical tradition remains important though it is typically bogged down by the lack of totalistic study that fields such as archaeology and ecology have given. Like Spengler, Toynbee viewed collapse in social terms. It was the product of an inability to respond to moral and religious challenges as opposed to physical and environmental ones. This presents a view that is unfulfilling alone, but necessary to incorporate into a wider understanding of collapse.

### *The Archaeological Tradition*

Of all the study of collapse, the archaeological tradition remains the most prolific.

As with any science, archaeology is challenged by physical remains and having to put pieces together from that. Luckily for them (though unfortunate for the rest of us), we can generalize the problems past civilizations had since all civilizations, including ours, work against the tendency to resist domestication and subjugation.

The archaeological work tends to be heavily academic and very specialized. The work produced is often very specific in nature and there is no shortage of books out there which focus on specific aspects of collapse in specific civilizations. Some of these works are highly regarded, but some just slip through the cracks. Of all these, Tainter's *Collapse of Complex Societies* stands apart as an overview of collapse theories and a masterpiece on the subject itself.

For much of the archaeological tradition, the question of inevitability typically remains unsaid. Ever the stand out, Tainter closes his book on the matter with a reminder that "in fact industrial societies are subject to the same principles that caused earlier societies to collapse."<sup>15</sup>

Archaeology, as a sub-sect of anthropology, has brought in a number of significant contributions from cultural anthropologists as well. Roy Rappaport's essay 'Maladaptation in Social Systems' has sent shockwaves throughout the field. The influence of cultural anthropology has had a significant impact upon research especially when looking towards the fact that hierarchy is *not* universal and is the key to the maladaptive roots of civilizations.<sup>16</sup>

He writes:

*Progressive segregation and progressive centralization were, of course, encouraged by the emergence of plant and animal cultivation 10,000 or so years ago, for plant and animal cultivation provided significant opportunities for full time division of labour.*<sup>17</sup>

It is here that he states the words that have haunted collapse theorists since: "Civilization has emerged only recently...and may yet prove to be an unsuccessful experiment."<sup>18</sup>

Rappaport's words mingle well with earlier anthropologists such as Leslie White, who noted that the concept of human control over civilization is "an anthropocentric illusion."<sup>19</sup> White also recognized that the "new Prometheus [industrialism] may also be the executioner [of our civilization]."<sup>20</sup>

This tradition underlies any study of collapse and has brought about a number of works, which we can use for our own conclusions. The importance of this cannot be underestimated and the kind of totalistic study that anthropologists like Rappaport have done continues to open the door for an examination such as ours.

### *The Sociological and Ecological Traditions*

The fields that have often received the most attention have been the sociological and ecological traditions.

The reason why is simple, these are two fields that speak directly to our own society, our own civilization. The complexity of our lives often allows us to merely shuffle all the information in with everyday life, hoping that it goes unnoticed. For the most part, the continued social refusal to acknowledge the kinds of research done here is in a large part thanks to the very advertising and manipulation—both governmental and corporate, though a distinction is arbitrary—of those who are being largely criticized.

The sociological search into collapse tends to be a bit of an offshoot of the historical and, to some degree, archaeological traditions. What is different with this approach is that it focuses almost entirely upon the social circumstances that, I would argue, are only part of collapse. Because of this, you'll often see a lot of speculation into what if questions, as if collapse of empires and civilizations is solely the work of one or two major players. This leans more towards the historical aspects of things, though it is still important to make some kind of distinction. Sociologist Max Weber best typifies this approach.

Weber's study of collapse in ancient civilizations is entirely focused on social angles. His primary inquiry into collapse focused on four arguments: tyranny urged the minds of the citizens into political action; recognition of material inequality between classes; weakened state foundations caused by the emancipation of women or slaves; and degeneration through picking the “most fit” for use in the army.<sup>21</sup>

Weber's interest lies in the interrelationship of classes and seemingly pays little attention to outside factors. Of course, for him: “There is little or nothing which ancient history can teach us about our own social problems.”<sup>22</sup>

However, this approach, typified by Weber, is not necessarily the norm for sociological searches into collapse. One possible reason for the importance of the sociological approaches is they are often tied in with ecological understandings. These approaches tend to be rather alarming and have caused a lot of stirring in the mainstream for being apocalyptic. The problem that comes from

these types of books is that they are often forgotten about or people will say things haven't happened as they were claimed yet, so it must not be true. The implications of the latter can be extremely dangerous.

This kind of work is something that will pop up often and either be recognized or not, but they come around rather often. One of the most important books of this type is William Catton's *Overshoot*.<sup>23</sup> The premise of Catton's work is hard to look past. This is something he makes a point of emphasizing: that civilization is already beyond the point of no return and collapse is inevitable. Catton has been largely responsible for bringing ecological terminology to the forefront of discussion. The concepts of *carrying capacity* and *crash* became conventional terms in the book's aftermath, though the implications have not necessarily sunk in.

The significance here is worth making explicit. Catton, in ecologically concerned fashion, takes a look at some of the most relevant and overlooked finds to show that we are essentially stealing from the future and the past with serious consequences. He brought forth Malthus' studies on the population explosion and its significance and dwelled extensively on the myth of alternative technologies and the impending fall of the oil economy in light of geophysicist M. K. Hubbert's work.

Though his work is continually being echoed,<sup>24</sup> Catton is most relevant here as he saw the recognition of the coming collapse as a chance to face it with some dignity. He argues, "the task facing mankind is to minimize the severity and inhumanity of the crash toward which we are headed."<sup>25</sup> We have the insight to know where we are headed, and we have the possibilities to avert the worst of all likely outcomes.

The kind of picture that Catton gives us is in line with historical, archaeological, anthropological, and ecological circumstance surrounding civilization. Having laid it out doesn't make it go away, but putting it in people's faces doesn't make them acknowledge it either. Some critics have gone so far to say that these kinds of works are merely creating fear to gather supporters for "voluntary organizations."<sup>26</sup> This is the kind of criticism that tends to come from those who are afraid to question the fate of their own civilization. Any number of politicians or corporate pawns make careers out of rejecting ecological responses to technological, industrial civilization, but all civilizations collapse.

The big ones just fall harder.

### *Symptoms of Collapse*

Searching through all of the literature, it's easy to become entrapped in any number of theories as to why a specific factor is what essentially brought down a civilization or empire. This includes anything from purely circumstantial causes, to revolts, to ecological catastrophe.

Most theorists seem content to stick to their generalizations as absolute truth rather than recognize collapse as being as totalistic in nature as the civilization or empire that it is enacted upon. I would argue that collapse is only truly collapse when it is felt in every realm of that society and therefore propose that it is not any single factor that brings about collapse, but the combination of them. As Lewis Mumford states: "Civilizations do not die of old age: they die of the complications of old age."<sup>27</sup>

Of all the theorists out there, I've found Tom Dale and Vernon Gill Carter to be the most important—though their language requires a bit of updating. For them, the symptoms of collapse are: war; change of climate; "moral decay" (or a movement towards the profane for Mircea Eliade,<sup>28</sup> post-modernism/passive nihilism for John Zerzan,<sup>29</sup> and what I'll further refer to as a spiritual deadening); political corruption (an oxymoron from an anarchist perspective indeed, I'll further preface it with "widely acknowledged" or "apparent"); economic maladjustment (or breakdown of the economic system); "deterioration of the race" (referring to the degeneration of health of the population, I'll refer to this as physical degeneration); and "poor leadership" (referring to the inability of the system to cope with systemic decay, I'll substitute this with "lack of methods to incorporate unrest").<sup>30</sup> Adding to this list, I have to borrow from Alexander Motyl, adding losing control of the periphery.<sup>31</sup>

Now, from my own readings, Dale and Carter are not highly mentioned among collapse theorists, but I find their summary to be most useful. It does not seem to clash with other significant collapse theorists in any significant manner. Tainter characterizes the basic themes regarding the cause of collapse as; resource depletion, establishment of a new resource base, insurmountable catastrophe, insufficient response to circumstances, dealing with

other complex societies, intruders, class/societal conflicts and/or elite mismanagement, social dysfunction, mystical factors, chance of concurrent negative events, and economic factors.<sup>32</sup> What Tainter has laid out is not necessarily contradictory to what has been laid out above. The list that will be used here is one I find to be more generally applicable and highlights the major points of relevancy.

Perhaps we should take a quick inventory to bring this back home a bit:

- War: Right now in the Middle East, spreading in Liberia and possibly in Asia, both for the American Empire. Not that these particular wars may be the war mentioned, but the War on Terrorism (and of course, not over oil and loss of control) is looking to be far from over.
- Change of Climate: Global warming, melting ice caps, droughts, el niño...sounding familiar yet?
- Spiritual Deadening: I'll have to agree with Zerzan on this one, pointing towards the increase in post-modernism and absolutist, passive nihilism. Though we've seen an increase in religiosity and a rise in such things as New Age spirituality, the true nature of this turn and its implications seems to point towards an increasing personal void.<sup>33</sup>
- Apparent Political Corruption: George W. Bush's election, Enron...the government is becoming more of a universal joke than ever before.
- Breakdown of the Economy: It's been reported for years that American statistics regarding unemployment have downplayed the 6% margin of error, which has only been surpassed by more common occurrences of stock market drops, loss of jobs to technology and globalization, not to forget just complete lack of interest in work. Let's also be realistic, people in Western nations have never been so easy to buy themselves into debt and the corporations have never been so eager to let them. If we didn't have credit cards, the Great Depression wouldn't even compare to our modern times.
- Physical Degeneration: Half of the planet's population is dying from excess while half die from starvation. Heart disease is one of the number one killers in the Western world linked most heavily with bad diet, stress, and over-

processed foods. Who reading this doesn't know someone who has been diagnosed with cancer, depression, or any other modern plague?

- Inability to Incorporate Unrest: This one is actually one of the few mechanisms that remain strong, and arguably the most necessary for the health of the state (which is why we anarchists are always attacking it so much). So long as people readily sedate themselves, there is some level of control, but the natural human inclination to resist domestication remains a force to be reckoned with.
- Loss of Periphery: Another tough one since the US military is controlling the helms here, but power can only be stretched so far, and the peripheral areas themselves are breaking down (see below section in regards to causes of collapse).

Perhaps by now this is starting to come a little bit closer to home. It's all in front of our eyes, but there are so many ways in which we remain sedate and refuse to recognize what is in front of us (disassociation).

This way of life is rapidly coming to its inevitable end.

### *Causes of Collapse*

It doesn't take much reading between the lines of the Dale and Carter study to drive things home. What becomes even more significant about their study (as has been echoed further since, most notably by Clive Ponting<sup>34</sup>) is the most essential reason for collapse of civilizations and empire: literally running out of fuel.

For Dale and Carter, the symptoms mentioned previously are, more or less, the socio-political side effects of ecological devastation, namely the destruction and loss of arable topsoil. As Richard Heinberg has pointed out, this ecological crisis is equally tied to the elimination of finite "resources."<sup>35</sup>

While this emphasis on ecological circumstance has been argued, it has typically been so under the misunderstanding that ecological catastrophe is what solely produces collapse, not including the aforementioned socio-political-economic aspects. Looking at the historic cases, it becomes very hard to find exceptions to this rule. The health of civilizations is maintained by colonization and

conquest as Stanley Diamond has pointed out,<sup>36</sup> and the primary reasons for these actions are to obtain more land or resources, worker and enslaved populations, or defending lands already in use for that civilization.<sup>37</sup> As much as we try to avoid it nowadays, we are still entirely dependent upon the Earth for survival.

Whatever way we word it or try to express the supposed need to expand, the root of it all is still in ecology. As Dale and Carter show, when you push it with the environment, you've opened yourself up to your final days.<sup>38</sup>

The only technicality that I see in this is the case of a pre-emptive revolution, which often meets Tainter's criteria. This, however, is typically one of the aforementioned symptoms, and in cases where this itself is not collapse; it has been merely a change over of that civilization from one empire to another.

### *Stages of Civilization*

In order to really examine the roots of collapse, it becomes necessary to step even further back and look at the entirety of civilization itself.

Alexander Motyl has described the stages of civilization and empire as; a period of growth, followed by a period of decay in which the core loses control over the periphery, a period of decline in which there is a reduction of imperial power, a disassembling of the core's rule, a period of attrition where peripheral territories are lost, followed by collapse, which he characterizes as a rapid breakdown of the system.<sup>39</sup> In some cases, there are revitalizations, although they are typically the reassertion of a given civilization after being absorbed by another.

What Motyl has laid out here is definitely open to further criticism, but has its validity. Civilization is a process that requires continual expansion. Whether it is in the form of tribal horticulturalists or our modern American empire, they follow what Ed Abbey characterized as "growth for the sake of growth," the ideology of a cancer cell. This period of growth can continue up to the beginnings of apparent collapse or peak at the climax of a given civilization. The change over to the period of collapse can be gradual or sudden, but in most cases, it's not even widely recognized.

Looking at all of this historically, this becomes all the more

alarming.

Civilization has spread out rather slowly though it is still being something rather recent. Humans have existed in some form for upwards of five to seven million years now, of which we've been *Homo sapien sapiens* for anywhere from 315,000 to 35,000 years ago. Our time as hunter-gatherers goes back even further into millions of years ago. This entire time can be characterized as a time of extremely gradual growth. It's not until 13,000 to 10,000 years ago that you really start having domestication and it's not till about 8,000 to 6,000 years ago that you start to have cities emerging (both dates being major points in the origins and clear emergence of what is referred to as civilization, respectively). In comparison with this, the industrial revolution is only within the last 200 years and our modern, hyper-technological society is only about fifty years old. This kind of rapid increase in growth—especially population—has caused a huge drop in the life of civilizations coupled with ultra-destructive and consuming society.

While the Mesopotamian civilization lasted for thousands of years, the American civilization may last less than half a millennium. After just two centuries, its veneer is already worn.

### *Some Assumptions About the Nature of Collapse*

In respect to looking at the stages of civilization and the likelihood of collapse, there are some more clarifications in order:

#### *1. Civilization was/is not inevitable.*

While I do argue that civilizations will inevitably fall, I don't feel that there is much more that is set in motion about them. They can take on many forms and can fall at various times, but all things with origins have endings. The history of our modern history is based on the idea of cultural superiority that was necessary to justify the conquest that fuels expanding empires.

The implications of all this are still in our language. "Primitive" is a term used on "uncivilized" societies in a completely negative sense. "Primitives" and "Barbarians" are considered "pre-state societies," as if they are just waiting to evolve into one. "Prehistory" carries the same implications.

There is no reason for our civilization to give up such loaded

words. For the same reason, Indigenous people worldwide are talked about historically, often in past tense. It is in the interest of the civilizers and domesticators to carry on this kind of dichotomy since it limits the thinking of those who have become domesticated. So long as we see history as having been manifested destiny or otherwise meant to happen, we limit our visions for what can happen and what we can become. Thus, we always hear things like “you can’t go back” or “you can’t turn back the clock” without recognizing that the idea of a straight line of history is just something we *impose* upon life.

It seems that in all likelihood, domestication was a rather isolated incident and nothing about it was ‘written’ into the human mind or body.

## *2. Domestication is a Forced Process, Carried Out Passively and Aggressively.*

The history of civilization is coupled with the history of resistance.<sup>40</sup>

Domestication is always taking or restraining. When the first crop was domesticated, it was a process of altering it from a wild state, coupled with agriculture, which removes a piece of otherwise wild land into cultivated property. A domesticated animal becomes dependent, as is the case with a domesticated human. A human becomes domesticated only by becoming the part of a hierarchical system, meaning that control over their own life is being forfeited to others. While a system becomes more centralized, people are necessarily dispossessed of the power to control their lives. Some have always acted against this system once it becomes apparent.

Though domestication has always been met with resistance, the domesticating society typically wins out. The reason is this: agricultural societies grow and the need for specialization and institutionalized division of labor arises. For the first time, there can be people who are otherwise capable of production, but who are not necessary for it. So these people now create and fill new positions in society and those are generally linked with power.

It is because of this that more time can be spent to build armies or newer weapons and technology. With increasing dependency comes increasing control, and ultimately there arise societies that have more of an ability to conquer others or clear out new land. A society of nomadic hunter-gatherers that neighbors an expanding

horticultural society is less likely able to deal with the kinds of military advancements agriculture provides.

And it is from this point that the history of civilization is written. That is a history of conquest and colonization.

### *3. Agriculture is a Process that Requires Growth.*

Overpopulation has been one of the most controversial and important issues brought up by the ecological movement.

The debate on the subject is always relatively loaded. The biggest problem is that any hope to incorporate zero population growth into this society requires an extension of authority into the womb of individuals. Not too many people are eager to argue for or accept that. What becomes apparent is that, like anything, reform isn't going to do anything. There needs to be a systemic change.

What I'm arguing here is nothing surprising and any look at population growth shows the same: agriculture is a way of life that spurs population growth and thus requires growth in general.

Paul Shepard notoriously argued that humans are “beings of the Paleolith.”<sup>41</sup> Over millions of years we've evolved as hunter-gatherers and struck a balance with the Earth. As with any other animal, we evolve ecologically or we don't last. That is a lesson we've been ignoring over the last 10,000 years. It's in our best interest as a species to maintain some level of balance. It has taken a lot of psychological damage to make this basic understanding of ‘the way things are’ seem so alien to us.

Nomadic hunter-gatherers typify this relationship. There are a number of ways in which these societies have kept from facing a strenuous level of population growth. While the approach is ecological in nature, it is by all means done for practical reasons as well.

One of the most fundamental ways in which population is kept in check is simply being nomadic.

Having to carry everything you use is a huge impediment to having a lot of stuff. If you're regularly on the move, it doesn't serve well to have multiple children to carry around and care for. Anthropologist Richard B. Lee characterizes this as a “contraceptive on your hip.”<sup>42</sup> Lacking the abstract morality of Western society, hunter-gatherers have no problem with making sure that birth control is taken care of. Indigenous societies are well versed in

plants and herbs that can be used as birth control. If those don't function sufficiently, there's no moral stigma attached to things such as abortion or infanticide. Other methods of keeping an average of four years in between children are lactational amenorrhea and sexual abstinence.<sup>43</sup> As repulsed as some Westerners get by some of these ideas, at least there is the decency to not keep a child that can't be given the full attention necessary.

Anthropologist Donald Henry noted that the greatest threat to this ecological stability comes from sedentism.<sup>44</sup> Spread of sedentary societies in the Near East brought a 700 percent increase in population.<sup>45</sup> Of course this may not sound as alarming considering the global population is doubling every two decades and that period is shortening. Both it should set off alarms. We have indicators of where civilization is driving us. A connection between the two should seem widely apparent. Unfortunately for us, it's not.

Sedentism increases population size as well as the ability for hierarchy and stratification to take root within a society. Agriculture takes the process even further. Sedentary hunter-gatherers still need to fit in the ecosystem because it provides all of their food and is, for the most part, out of their hands. Once people begin to grow their own crops or raise animals for food, the amount of food becomes controllable and can be increased relatively easily, it becomes a matter of labor and management. Sedentary societies only encourage further growth. Not moving as much means that more than one child can be breast-fed and with larger populations, more children can run around.

What starts with sedentism can become a warring state, one typified by Diamond as maintained by conquest abroad and repression at home.<sup>46</sup> The history of civilization is essentially the history of social growth and the necessary devouring of the environment to fuel it. Warfare is something that emerges primarily with agriculture as defense of arising territories. All wars are essentially resource wars,<sup>47</sup> be it amongst horticulturalists in the South Pacific,<sup>48</sup> or the current war in Iraq.<sup>49</sup>

The reason is simple: despite any adaptations societies make, we are all dependent upon finite resources. There are resources that are readily reproducing, and those are the resources that hunter-gatherers base their lives upon. However, that kind of nomadic lifestyle is necessary to ensure that any particular area is not depleted beyond its ability to reproduce itself naturally. This

is basic ecology, a circular system of life and death, consumption and reproduction. Agriculture breaks this by virtue of its constant growth—not kept in check among many horticultural societies by means of warfare—and inevitably overtaxing the environment and requiring more land.

Horticulturalists have adapted systems that can keep some check on ecological destruction, but these are based upon having large areas of land that won't be touched. Gardens are slowly moved to ensure longer fallow periods for regeneration of the soils, but this only slows the process down. In comparative terms, these are sustainable, but in the long run, they too will require conquest of new areas. Any land can only take so much manipulation and depletion before it returns much less than the energy put into it. That is the nature of things. Things like artificial fertilizers have been band-aid approaches to this problem, though the consequences of chemicals are always hitting us back in the face and their failure will only bring about more wide-scale devastation.

#### *4. Horticulture doesn't necessarily lead to techno-industrial civilization; but it is as capable of collapsing.*

Horticultural societies struggle to curb growth, but rarely is growth avoided. They typically are much slower in this process than full-blown agricultural societies, but they grow nonetheless. However, these societies can take on a number of forms, and there is by no means a necessary path that they will all follow. Looking at cultures throughout the South Pacific Islands, you'll see any number of horticultural societies, from nearly egalitarian ones to chiefdoms.

The fact that technological industrial society *did* arise does not mean that it was *intended*. History is made up of chance occurrences, and it seems that this applies as much for the origins of domestication as it does for computer technology. These things happened, and aren't likely to have arisen in any other circumstance.

This is by no means any assurance to the strength of a society. Horticultural societies collapse, though we don't focus on them as much. They typically haven't happened in the waves of colonization and its fallout or haven't been perceived as being significant enough for us civilized folks to look at. In South America, you have hunter-gatherer peoples who have come back to this life way as the result of collapsed horticultural society. Such a move is generally much

easier to make as horticulturalists are still generally tied to their hunter-gatherer heritage. Even such widely studied groups as the Yanomami have only become horticulturalists within relatively recent times.

They often stand as a rather pure form of Tainter's theory that a society collapses when more effort is put into production than is received from it. Put simply, when the land is becoming too hard to work, it's easier to just give up on that way of life than to try and make more of it. Or social complexity becomes such a big issue that people will no longer tolerate the increasing centralization. This kind of situation has happened over and over again throughout the southwestern United States and Mesoamerica. The importance of this is shown in the final assumption.

### *5. All civilizations collapse, some just last longer than others.*

If growth is at the heart of civilization, then none are exempt. The stages of civilization that Motyl lays out are important because they are not specific to any particular civilization or kind of civilization, but because they point towards a trend in civilizations and empires. This is a trend that is echoed throughout the world and has been reiterated through the minds of the civilized in the form of 'natural law': what goes up must come down.

Domestication represents a major break with the cycle of life and of ecosystems. It is, by all means, an original mediation. The process of growth can be seen best in the form of increasing social stratification and centralization of power. As the grasp on power of that center grows, so does its removal from the very source of all existence, the Earth. Once you start pretending you're not an animal or remove yourself from ecology, you've started on a path towards pure mediation.

Horticultural societies will typically last longer than industrial societies because there isn't enough technology available to separate those with more influence or control away from the Earth. As those with power become more removed, they are more likely to make fatal mistakes and not recognize them. So George Bush can claim that the environmental crisis isn't serious, but a Trobriand chief would know immediately. That is the nature of stratification. That is also the reason why more complex, centralized empires could conquer civilizations in Mesopotamia and allow it to crash because

they neglected the importance of maintaining the canals. Or it's the reason why Western powers can push industrial mono-cropping in India. Or the reason why Europeans could deforest the Americas at such a fast pace.

Centralization of power only increases the pace of collapse. Not only this, but it makes that collapse all the more serious. And so long as we continue to destroy what remains of healthy ecosystems and of ourselves, our chances for survival remain dismally low.

### *What Brings About Collapse*

For the most part we've looked at what has constituted collapse in mainly historical terms. We've seen that collapse is bound to happen with all stratified societies, but all the more quickly as complexity increases. We've seen that at its base, collapse is the result of a civilization over-exerting itself, or in Tainter's view, by a civilization requiring more energy than can be produced. Essentially a civilization collapses because it can devour no more and will turn on itself.

A number of people have tried to really look at what it is that caused us to go astray, or what it is that is causing us the most damage. This questioning has gone on under any number of banners and has resulted in everything from social-political movements to religious Puritanism. So it should come as little surprise to see people on all ends of the spectrum predicting some kind of coming crash or apocalypse. Diversity in reactions to this kind of acknowledgement aside, there are some things that are often recognized, though not always critically.

Zoologist Konrad Lorenz characterized our faults as "civilized man's eight deadly sins" which he warns "are threatening to destroy not only our civilization but mankind as a species."<sup>50</sup> These include;

- Overpopulation
- Destruction of the Environment
- Technological Race Against Ourselves
- Lessening of Deep Emotions
- Genetic Decay
- Hostility Between Generations
- Increasing Vulnerability to Indoctrination
- Nuclear Armament

What Lorenz is pointing to here is rather common, though the wording differs. What these particular “sins” point towards is the way in which collapse will be played out and note the extremity of our distancing from nature. The kinds of things that Lorenz points out are often central issues among ecological groups. What is important to note is that it is not any single fault that will ultimately cause a civilization to collapse. They are typically much more capable of dealing with problems here and there.

In fact, this is one essential trait of empire: the ability to adapt to or co-opt problematic areas.

This concept of adaptability has been vital to collapse studies, especially after Rappaport made it such a central issue. Archaeologist Brian Fagan made this a highlight in his study of El Niño weather patterns and their impact on civilizations.<sup>51</sup> What he found was a regular occurrence that brings both floods and famine through Asia and South America, primarily and inevitably shaking the global ecology. So the three primary threats to a civilization that will be subject to this pattern are: overpopulation, global warming, and rapid climate change. Of course, this is only part of the problem.

When an El Niño storm hits, the rapid climate fluctuations and floods or droughts will cause massive structural damage, but, more importantly, will cause massive crop failures. A crop failure won’t topple a civilization, but, as we’ve seen in almost every centralizing society, those with more power are going to continue hoarding food, at least as long as they can. What starving, dispossessed people do when faced with this kind of situation is little mystery. Of course, peasant revolts don’t make droughts or floods go away, they are still likely to happen.<sup>52</sup>

Fagan’s study focused on these ecological conditions as a given and set out to see the effects they had upon civilizations. The climate was essentially a spark for the collapse of many civilizations and empires. Whether a civilization would survive would depend on the ability to adapt. What was also found was that a civilization that was less adaptive and further removed from the land was less likely to take these kinds of storms over time.

He ends with the realization that: “No one force—overpopulation, global warming, or rapid climate change—will destroy our civilization. But the combination of all three makes us prey to the knockout blow that could.”<sup>53</sup>

*An Anarcho-Primitivist Critique*

In concluding this overview and contextualization of collapse and collapse theory, I'll focus on the perspective that I'm coming from: the anarcho-primitivist (AP) critique.

It is important to note that there is no official AP position on collapse. AP is not a party, program, or ideology, but a critique of civilization. Being anarchistic in its orientation, it is not without implications. However, an arguable strength of the critique is this open-endedness. Regardless, the common implication and action comes along the lines of "for the destruction of civilization" or, as John Zerzan states, "we have to dismantle all this."<sup>54</sup>

According to anarcho-primitivist archaeologist Theresa Kintz, the following are the essentials of the AP critique:

- Society as we know it now in the industrial world is pathological and the civilizing impulses of certain dominant groups and individuals are effectively to blame.
- Trends in communication towards acts of symbolic representations have obstructed human beings ability to directly experience one another socially, and alienated us from the rest of the natural world.
- Humanity basically took a wrong turn with the advent of animal domestication and sedentary agriculture, which laid the foundation for the exploitation of the earth, facilitated the growth of hierarchical social structures and subsequently the ideological control of the many by the few.
- All technology besides the stone-age techniques of hunter-gatherers is inherently detrimental to social relations and set the stage for the ecological catastrophe now being brought on by the technoinustrial system.<sup>55</sup>

The critique is essentially attempting to contextualize the kinds of things that are brought up in the various collapse theories. It is attempting to drive this home. Theresa Kintz does this rather well when she points out:

*America and its allies with their ahistorical blinders on arrogantly*

*view Western civilization as invincible. Rest assured, so did the Egyptian Pharaohs, the Roman Emperors and the Ottoman Caliphs...but where are they now? Did the Mayan peasants or leaders envision their city-states someday covered by jungle (perhaps the peasants actually did, is that why it happened)? What do we really expect someplace like Manhattan or London will look like in 500, 5,000, 50,000 years? The truth is that as long as skyscrapers, military industrial complexes, investment bankers and jet airplanes exist the possibility exists they'll collide.<sup>56</sup>*

The idea that surplus, sedentism, and domestication have altered how humans have existed and related to each other and the rest of the world, as has been argued consistently by John Zerzan,<sup>57</sup> is by no means unique to AP. The movement away from egalitarianism is widely noted among anthropologists and that it is noted as a step towards collapse is almost equally as common. For these reasons, any study of the rise of hierarchical societies will generally incorporate a fall or vice versa. What is more unique in this is the idea that the occurrence of surplus, sedentism, and domestication were, more or less, a wrong turn.

Of course, this position is by no means unique to anarchoprimitivists either. Primitivism has a heritage as old as civilization and this has been widely studied.<sup>58</sup> One of the texts that has been most influential to the AP critique, Fredy Perlman's *Against History, Against Leviathan*,<sup>59</sup> made this a central point in focusing on resistance to civilizations. One of the most central social theory philosophers, Jean Jacques Rousseau, made his major break by suggesting that the arts and sciences have not benefited humanity.<sup>60</sup> The uniqueness of the AP critique lies in its audience and the intention of destroying civilization.

In light of this, the realization that all civilizations collapse, and that this one is facing its inevitable end, is a bit of a homecoming. The effects of domestication are totalistic and must be in order for civilization to exist. So the turn towards civilization necessitates a turn away from the wildness and chaos that humans have flourished in. The origins of surplus, sedentism, and domestication are correlated with the origins of power and property and any increase in social stratification increases hierarchy and centralization of power.

John Connor characterizes this dispossession:

*The consequence of [increasing centralization of power] has been a loss of the immediate, a loss of our sense of Self, of the selfhood of others (including non-human others) and our affinity with them, and also – paradoxically – a loss of control and of the meaningfulness and satisfaction of life the more Power is concentrated and elaborated.<sup>61</sup>*

So the AP critique would point out that the collapse of civilizations, especially our globalized civilization, is inevitable as civilization is attempting to conquer and subdue nature. That's a fatal mistake that the lofty ideologies of progress and linear, scientific reason look beyond, but never address.

The characterization of nature in this view should not be taken in its conventional sense. A part of the critique is to show that the kind of arbitrary lines civilized humans have placed between themselves and the other are just abstractions. We are the human animal, and we will always have to deal with this whether we chose to or not.

Because of this, nature is not just some external thing like wilderness or forests, but the underlying essence of all life. Nature requires us to eat and breathe as much as it is flowing water or wind. It is what encompasses our being whether we are conscious of it or not. This is why domestication is such an arduous process and so violent at times. It is why removing ourselves from the community of life into the technological haven of the city with pollution as a constant results in the rise of cancer. We argue that nature can no longer be seen as an abstraction, but the essence of all life.

Another unique aspect of the AP critique is the emphasis based on seeing civilization as a totality. Just as Jacques Ellul noted that technology is inseparable from technological society,<sup>62</sup> the AP critique has pointed out that civilization is not neutral, that the good parts can't be removed from the bad. So as all of the social, psychological, and ecological ills are recognized, they are treated contextually. In this sense, anarcho-primitivists are generally extremely critical of reform or single-issue approaches to our impending crisis.

Whereas Marvin Harris recognized that: "All rapidly intensifying systems of production, whether they be socialist, capitalist, hydraulic, Neolithic, or Paleolithic, face a common

dilemma. The increment in energy invested per unit time in production will inevitably overburden the self-renewing, self-cleansing, self-generating capacities of the ecosystem.”<sup>63</sup> He saw that a “shift to more efficient technologies” was the solution. Of course, this doesn’t stop population pressure, relieve social stress, or respond to the ecological deterioration implicit in agriculture. If you only approach some aspects of our current crisis, you’ll only switch the kind of problem on hand. Attempts to curb population tend to result in fascistic policies—ones more often pointed at the poor. Communism, socialism, and most strands of anarchism respond either slightly better if not as badly to the ecological consequences of production as capitalists.<sup>64</sup>

So with a critique of the totality of civilization, single issues or reform offer little more than social bandages. The failures of these approaches were the subject of Ted Kaczynski’s satirical essay, ‘Ship of Fools’.<sup>65</sup> As an outcome of this, in relation to collapse, I would have to agree with John Connor when he writes:

*undoubtedly [Spengler] still felt the collapse of civilization would be a tragic loss, as the fall of Rome was held to be. As an anarcho-primitivist, I couldn’t disagree more. An unsustainable worldwide system that substitutes domination and hierarchy for authentic community is inhuman and intolerable.*<sup>66</sup>

The implications of this are very important.

The contextualization of collapse theory to our own civilization and an attempt to show the consequences of this is vital to any attempt to thwart the worst-case scenarios. Like Catton, I see the collapse as a chance to make our destiny, as I have and will continue to argue. We are not mere spectators of collapse, but active participants. Whether that means remaining a part of the system that reaps the conditions for social, ecological, and psychological catastrophe or as an agent of returning to the nature that is within ourselves, and thus turn the collapse into a chance to reclaim humanity rather than remain a threat to all life.

It is with this in mind that I want to give some hope and desire to make the most of our fate. This is by no means saying there is nothing to fear about it. In fact, I think if you’re not afraid, you’re probably not thinking seriously enough about it. That civilization will fall is certain, how and when are to some degree, up to us. It

is for these reasons that I urge people to become active in bringing this down and avoid the worst of all possibilities.

Remember, there is always a chance and a return to nature is not about turning back the clock, but reawakening ourselves and acting on it.

2005

*Endnotes*

1. Roy Rappaport, 'Maladaptation in Social Systems,' in Friedman and Rowlands, *the Evolution of Social Systems*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1978. Pg 66.
2. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989.
3. Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, New York: Cambridge, 1988, pg. 4.
4. Spengler was an early supporter of the Nazis, despite not being a fan of Hitler and a private critic of the Third Reich's reliance on anti-Semitism. The Nazis banned the last book he published in his lifetime, *The Hour of Decision*, due to its critiques of National Socialism. He turned down speaking opportunities offered by Goebbels, but he was far from some kind of hero, turning his support openly towards Mussolini as the Faustian fascist he was waiting for.
5. John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State, 2001. Pg 37.
6. Cited in Tainter, 1988. Pg. 41.
7. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West, Volume II*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1961. Pg. 477.
8. Farrenkopf, 2001. Pg. 38.
9. Norman Yoffee, "Orienting Collapse" in Yoffee and Cowgill (eds.), *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations*. Tucson: Univ of Arizona, 1995. Pg 3.
10. *Ibid.* Pg. 3-4.
11. *Ibid.* Pg. 4.
12. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I-VII*. New York: Oxford, 1987. Pg. 254.
13. Farrenkopf, 2001. Pg 233.
14. Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial and The World and the*

- West. Cleveland: Meridian, 1964. Pgs. 145-146.
15. Tainter, 1988. Pg 216.
  16. Rappaport, 1978. Pgs 54-58.
  17. *Ibid.* Pg. 65.
  18. *Ibid.* Pg. 66.
  19. Leslie White, *The Science of Culture*, New York: Grove, 1949. Pgs 330-359.
  20. *Ibid.* Pg 362.
  21. Max Weber, *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations*, London: NLB, 1976. Pg. 390.
  22. *Ibid.* Pg 391.
  23. William Catton. *Overshoot: the Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change*. Chicago: Univ. of Illinois, 1982.
  24. Heinberg, 2003, for example.
  25. Catton, 1982. Pg. 216.
  26. As Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky argue in their book *Risk and Culture*. Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1982.
  27. Lewis Mumford. *The Condition of Man*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944. Pg. 418
  28. *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959.
  29. See *Running on Emptiness* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003) and 'Globalization and its Apologists: an abolitionist perspective' in *Green Anarchy* #14 pgs 1,3.
  30. Tom Dale and Vernon Gill Carter, *Topsoil and Civilization*, Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1955. Pgs. 16-20.
  31. Alexander Motyl, *Imperial Ends*, New York: Columbia UP, 2001.
  32. Tainter, 1988. Pg. 42.
  33. Interestingly enough, many of the symptoms of collapse are also recognized as stages in building revitalization movements for anthropologist Anthony F.C. Wallace, not to underscore the cross over with symptoms for revolutionary currents to arise.
  34. See *Green History of the World*, New York: Penguin, 1991.
  35. *The Party's Over*, Gaborola Island: New Society, 2003.
  36. Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, New Brunswick: Transaction, 1987, pg. 1.
  37. As still is the case, see Michael Klare, *Resource Wars*, New York: Owl, 2002.
  38. Which, I would argue, is a process begun with the origins of domestication.

39. Motyl, *Imperial Ends*.
40. See John Zerzan *Elements of Refusal*, Columbia: CAL, 1999 and Fredy Perlman, *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan*. Detroit: Black and Red, 1983.
41. Most notably in *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*. Athens: University of Georgia, 1998. and *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. Washington DC: Island, 1998.
42. Cited in Chellis Glendinning, *My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization*. Boston: Shambhala, 1994. Pg. 50.
43. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. Pg. 89.
44. Referenced in Glendinning, 1994, pg. 74.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Diamond, 1987, pg. 1.
47. See Klare, 2002.
48. As argued by Andrew Vayda in *War in Ecological Perspective*. New York: Plenum, 1976.
49. See Heinberg, 2003.
50. Konrad Lorenz, *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanich, 1973. Pg. 101
51. Brian Fagan, *Floods, Famines and Emperors*. New York: Basic, 1999.
52. A point really driven home by the case of the Russian Revolution.
53. *Ibid.* Pg. 259.
54. Zerzan, 2003a, Pg 158.
55. Theresa Kintz. 'Introduction' to Zerzan, 2003a. Pg. ix.
56. *Ibid.* Pg. xii.
57. See Zerzan, 1999.
58. For example see George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1948.
59. Fredy Perlman, *Against His-story, Against Leviathan*. Detroit: Black and Red, 1983.
60. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*. London: Everyman, 1993.
61. John Connor, *The Rise of the West*. London: Green Anarchist, 2001. Pg. 56.
62. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. New York: Vintage, 1964.
63. Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings*. New York: Vintage, 1977.

Pg. 271.

64. Social ecologist and ex-anarchist Murray Bookchin has even advocated nuclear power as an “ecological alternative” to the fuel economy. See Bob Black, *Anarchy After Leftism*. Columbia: CAL, 1996.

65. Though Kaczynski argues for an anti-technological movement, I feel (through discussion and argument) that his cause is very much in line, in practical terms, with anti-civilization attacks. Although this doesn’t necessarily mean our visions or critiques are the same.

66. Connor, 2001. Pg. 3.

# Revolt of the “Savages”

In ‘The Rising of the Barbarians,’ Wolfi Landstreicher lays out very clearly his influences for his “revolutionary perspective” in order to draw out exactly where his lines of solidarity lie. I can respect his clarity on the subject, but I think it demands an equal response on my own part. He writes: “‘Primitive’ people have often lived in anarchic and communistic ways, but they do not have a history of revolutionary struggle from which we can loot weapons for our current struggle.”

And this is where I couldn’t disagree more, especially regarding the postmodern overtones. The question has been raised as to what the contextual limits are on the implication of ‘revolutionary struggle,’ but my response is the same. While I won’t argue that more recent revolutionary struggles have nothing to offer me, I’d argue the opposite of Wolfi, that “primitive” people—and yes, I wince at using the term—have every bit of a history of revolt *against civilization*.

Perhaps I should clarify what I’m pointing towards in regards to revolution. For me, revolution comes about through the destruction or fatal disabling of civilization in a totalistic sense. Meaning very simply that I’m not talking about overthrowing or grabbing power long enough to rid the current regime or form, but essentially attacking the very thing that makes it possible for people to hold power over others: most immediately, the technological grid. I feel the utmost solidarity with those who have rejected and revolted against the civilized order, which, by definition, must impose itself upon others to exist. That system is, by all means, the antithesis

of anarchy as it requires the surrendering of autonomy and self-determination for all life.

There is no shortage of literature regarding the plight of those who have been fighting this from inception to date, a minute portion of that will be the focus of this essay. As anthropologist John Bodley writes in *Victims of Progress*, Indigenous resistance is generally aimed at being left alone, as the Free Papua Movement has reiterated in its current struggles. There are those who will keep away as long as possible, those who will fight, and those who see no other option outside of presumed acculturation through force, deception, or deprivation.

It is nearly impossible for us to imagine the mentality of peoples who are fighting, not to improve the conditions of their *survival*, but for their *lives*. That many of us don't equate genocide and ethnocide comes from the fact that we really have no intrinsically deep connection with what it means to live and be a part of the community of life. Being in a situation that is absolutely bleak by any standard, Indigenous peoples throughout the world and throughout history have fought with absolute conviction and fervor while preserving everything that is beautiful about life. It is impossible for me to convey the feeling I get when thinking of the Tasmanian hunter-gatherers who walked towards their would-be conquerors as if surrendering while dragging a spear between their toes in the face of annihilation. For these people, resistance is not a matter of abstract principle and ideology, but coming from the depths of their being.

Something Wolfi is far too easy to write off, but seemingly incapable of understanding.

Whether we are talking about the Kayapo of northern Brazil, the Indigenous resistance throughout the South Pacific,<sup>1</sup> traditional Dineh on the Black Mesa; we are talking about resistance that is not just against capitalism, but also against the entire artificial order. What I have found looking at Indigenous resistance, both contemporary and historic, is a spiritual and tactical arsenal from which I gain nothing but hope and strength, much as I hope any anti-civilization insurgent or revolutionary would hope to aspire.

There are two particular cases of Indigenous resistance that seem particularly important towards attacking the totality of civilization: the Pueblo Revolts of 1680 and the Apache resistance to colonization.

### *The Pueblo Revolts of 1680*

In terms of pillaging the past for clues as to what we can learn and apply for our own resistance, it seems the Pueblo Revolt—which swept and successfully removed the yoke of Spanish colonialism for 12 years—is as good a place as any to start.

My interests in this particular revolt arose while I was walking through the city center of Taos, New Mexico (which has been for up to five thousand years) and I was told the street I was walking was where the Spanish Governor's head was rolled in the immediate aftermath of the Pueblo Revolt. It stood as a great shame to the 17<sup>th</sup> century colonial European powers to be beaten so badly and, in every sense, outsmarted. The Pueblo Revolt stands as one of the most relevant case points as to how the weaknesses of civilization could be used against it.

The Spanish exploitation of the Pueblo peoples and land originates in the very late 16<sup>th</sup> century as the European empires tore across the “New World,” attempting absolute conquest over both the human populations and the Earth itself. It would seem most ironic that these very factors were the key to the success of the revolts, as the Spanish had few other options but to put absolute faith in the power of their technological ability to subjugate both.

The Pueblo were a source of labor and produce in what was an otherwise very dependent colony. The land that the Pueblo had lived on was very ecologically fragile; it had been grounds for empires to collapse in the then recent past. This created a population of mixed descent, dependent upon a very ecologically sensitive form of horticulture based primarily off of irrigation and clustering of crops to get the most out of a short and undependable growing season. The ever-present ecological stresses alone were enough on a community that was held together through a catered spirituality and its ritualism. The Spanish attack upon the people and their spirituality only fermented an otherwise patient anger and frustration against the attempts to turn their sacred land into a resource base for mercantile capitalism. The initially passive approach to the Spanish was to be completely altered by the continuation of brutal executions and worsening conditions for the Pueblo.

## The Revolt

The revolt itself is widely accredited to the work of the prophet Popé,<sup>2</sup> an emerging “political leader” of the San Juan Pueblo and a traditionalist shaman.

As a shaman, Popé was subjected to a particularly specific kind of repression from the Spanish as they tried to curb the “savage religions” and create Christians out of the “heathens.” Much to their dismay, the more that he was made a symbol of harsh reprisal for enacting his spirituality via public floggings, the more he became a symbol for traditional resistance against Spanish colonialism. This would essentially open the role of spiritual and tactical advisor for a successful revolt and it was here that he began to plot it.

After a four-year prison sentence for “sorcery,” Popé relocated among the Taos Pueblo where he was only more adamant in preaching, “Indians must be Indians again.” The revolt was, in every aspect, ecologically based; he was receiving his council from Po-he-yemu (“one who scatters mist”), meaning that the revolt was taking its command from the sky. He was able to anticipate traitors among the Pueblo, primarily those who had turned towards Christianity, and planned accordingly.

The Spanish were well aware that a revolt was being planned, but could get no information other than the leader being Po-he-yemu, whom was believed to be on the other side of the mountains where captured and interrogated Pueblos would point. The entire time they were looking for an actual being when ironically their unknown ringleader was actually the sky.

Popé’s plan for revolt was based off a clear understanding of the weaknesses of the Spanish and the strengths of the Earth. As they had been unable to fully plant themselves in this exotic and taxed environment, the Spanish were dependent upon bi-monthly supply shipments that came up the Rio Grande. Popé saw the river as a snake, and recognized that cutting it off at one point would bring about dramatic effects for the rest of the body. He knew that other peoples would carry their support for an attack upon the Spanish and, as had many other Indigenous prophet-warriors, was able to unify huge regions of Indigenous peoples from various backgrounds to offer their support. He recognized that the sporadic rains would always slow the shipment of supplies considerably for the Spanish and towards the end of the bi-monthly period they

were always scraping the bottom of the barrel for resources. They were left at their weakest.

By looking towards Po-he-yemu, the peoples were watching the sky, knowing that the revolt would occur when the bi-monthly shipment was delayed by the coming of the rains. At that point, the Pueblo and supporters all along the Rio Grande would carry out a highly organized attack upon the Spanish starting with taking out the supply shipment and moving up the river before the northern towns had even found out the fate of those south of them. The revolt came as a complete surprise, even though the Spanish knew a revolt was likely to come at any time. Despite this, it was completely successful in debilitating Spanish rule.

The revolt was successful when gauged as anti-colonial resistance as it had kept the Spanish powers at bay for 12 years (as long as the FSLN were able to hold out revolution in Nicaragua). The reason for the failure of the revolution can be seen as another lesson to learn from past resistance. After the revolt, Popé took it upon himself to claim some bit of the power vacuum that had been left in the chasm between traditional Pueblo culture and that of the Spanish colonizers. He saw the success of the revolution as a heads up to his impromptu leadership position, mocking more appropriately the role of Christian leaders in Spain at the time than shamans among any Indigenous culture.

Popé's new found tendency towards power created divisions and distrust amongst the Pueblo, leaving them more apt to be reconquered by the Spanish, as they eventually were. What can be exhibited best by the revolt then, is not only a view on attacking the weaknesses of civilization, but at the importance of doing so in a manner that can prevent a position of power to remain open.

For all intents and purposes, this suits us rather well. The Pueblo society, while being under heavy attack and repression by Spanish colonizers, was still in some semblance of its traditional shape, much like it had been for thousands of years. It was relatively localized and the face of power was within physical grasp, as was proven. In this sense, the complete alienation that our society creates between the people and the “people in power” creates a scenario in which the role of power is always out of reach. Disabling the technological system that fuels this highly stratified society would create a jolt towards localization that is almost completely unknown to us.

The Pueblo Revolts give us a glimpse of vital elements of

guerrilla warfare tied to ecological situations more so than any of the civilized revolutions, and therefore something that seems more applicable in an assault on the whole of civilization.

### *Apache Resistance*

The Apache carried on one of the most successful campaigns against colonization during the peak of westward expansion. In every sense, their resistance speaks of the beauty and conviction of a people who would risk everything in order to flee a life out of their own hands.

When thinking of the Apache, we are often left with the image of Geronimo, despite his role as more of an exception than the rule among warriors. Not to write him off, but he was far more of a “loose cannon” than many of the other legendary Apache warriors who fought and died against the tide of civilization. Of which Victorio comes to mind. He, like other warriors, led campaigns against colonizers and took his own life before being taken captive. This stands as a confirmation of why, after exhaustive and complete efforts to annihilate (physically and culturally, respectively) the Apache, the colonial powers were never able to capture an Apache warrior unless they had surrendered.

The Apache were hunter-gatherers, which seems to have been the key to the relative success of their resistance. In this respect they completely embody any kind of ideal as far as guerrilla warfare against civilization goes. Unlike Leftist guerrillas, they were completely self-sufficient (and able to steal from the army whatever they needed additionally) and thus not reliant upon a peasantry for support or for knowledge of the area.

One of the greatest testimonies of the strength, physically and spiritually, of the Apache is Eve Ball's recorded narrative from a then young Apache, James Kaywaykla who grew up through a period of prolonged warfare and still leaves us with a beautiful account not only of resistance, but the beauty of Apache life: *In the Days of Victorio*. Apache of all ages were brought into the life and death battle against those who sought to tame them either by physical elimination or “eliminating the savage” in them. The young were as much a part of the warfare as were the warriors, and under these conditions the Apache only fought harder. Kaywaykla sums by pointing out:

*[The American forces] have admitted frankly that they were outwitted, out-maneuvered, and out-fought by a handful of ill-equipped, half starved warriors, handicapped by the presence of their families, and dependent upon what they could steal of food and ammunition. They testified to the caliber of my people by placing thousands of theirs in the field against a few—a very few—of ours.<sup>3</sup>*

It was the standard for the Apache to have a minimal amount of warriors against hundreds and more of well armed and prepared soldiers. Yet the Apache would be able to hold out against them. The Apache would learn to adapt and incorporate every aspect of warrior life into their culture, which, much to their benefit, was still able to leave their core values and beliefs relatively intact.

### *Questions of Applicability*

The question remains: what can be learned from the Apache resistance and what ultimately brought about its end?

The Apache were far more successful when gauged on a per battle basis with any of the successful civilized revolutions that have been carried out over the last centuries. They were far more mobile and flexible than Cuba's 26 Julio Army, the Sandinistas, the Shining Path, and so on. They were capable of bringing about a more exhaustive assault on the enemy. What seems to stand out the most is that the lifeway of the Apache was completely at odds with the nature of the civilization they were fighting against. It's noteworthy to recognize that Cuba achieved its highest rates of sugar production for international export after the revolution; it was still in a viable position for the market. The end of the Apache's campaign could easily be seen as more akin with the fate of the Sandinistas who Reagan saw as a part of the communist threat in his backyard and thus carried out a lengthy counter-revolutionary guerrilla war to ensure that the FSLN wouldn't be able to assert themselves, politically and economically.

So what is the message here? Are we as doomed as the Apache and the Pueblo if we look towards their resistance as our own arsenal? From what I see, the problem isn't the conviction or the tactics. The Apache, like most Indigenous peoples (such as the revolutionaries

in Bougainville), put in practice the principles of guerrilla warfare as good, if not better than civilization's revolutionaries that would follow or coincide with them. The problem is the nature of this particular stage of civilization, with its hyper-specialization, mega-technology, and a huge surplus of people as potential cannon fodder. The only reason that the United States has jurisdiction over what was Apache land was that they had the numbers and the capital to just continually throw at westward expansion. It's not a question of ability, but of how much you have on the table to lose. Fortunately, it seems entirely possible to just disable the whole thing with minimal warfare as the vital organs of civilization become more centralized and more self-dependent.

My decision to limit this brief bit on the topic to the Pueblo Revolt and the Apache resistance was far from unintentional. It seems that a critical reprisal of what any resistance has to offer us should focus on both targets and on methods of hitting those targets. The ability of Popé to plan ecologically against the weaknesses of Spanish colonization, mixed with the spiritual and physical determination and fighting ability of the Apache, creates an extremely volatile mixture against the current order. The question of what can be achieved is intrinsically tied to what it is we are going to attack, as Wolfi had appropriately pointed out.

Looking at the history of civilizations and our current state, it becomes apparent that this global civilization is bound to collapse, and soon. Of course collapse comes about as much internally as externally, and I think the latter is unquestionably preferable. From what I know, it is entirely possible that a calculated attack against the technological grid could bring about a large enough pulse in the organs of this civilization to give it a lethal blow. This requires a dedication not towards abstract principles, but an understanding of what it is we are losing and what we have to gain and to fight for. Paired with an ecological understanding of how power functions.

Is what I'm fighting for just the enactment of my own will? I have no policy to impose upon the world or any kind of "master plan" that I seek to impose after that vacuum may potentially be created. What I hope to achieve is the elimination of a system that destroys the potential of all life to live free by virtue of existence. That limiting comes as much by contaminating the air, soil, water, and flesh of all life as it does by direct control over individuals.

As an anarchist, I see that system, civilization, as the

impediment to a truly autonomous existence. This is a target that has been recognized by Indigenous resistors who merely want to “be left alone,” fighting for their autonomy and self-determination. Knowledge of how “primitives” have lived plays an equal part in the destruction of the totality of civilization. I see it as in many ways being an insurrection for the mind against the linear, rationalized future-obsessed thought that allows the continuation of civilization within our own minds and within the world at large.

Culminating a successful attack against this entire order seems to point towards the tactics and conviction which Indigenous peoples have used against civilization every step of the way. The knowledge of life that a hunter-gatherer has creates a situation of absolute independence, which has always been a weakness for civilization’s guerillas. Past and current revolutionaries have only been successful so long as they use and ultimately exploit the Indigenous and peasant populations of the areas they seek to claim, just as all colonizers have and do.<sup>4</sup> The underlying populism of creating a solidified force has always been a trap for the few to impose their social policies and must therefore always be viewed critically.<sup>5</sup> Any successful revolt will only be the product of determined individuals fighting for their absolute autonomy.

Essentially, like Wolfi, I’m laying out what I see as a part of my own “revolutionary will,” and with it my sources of inspiration and my desires, hoping that it will serve in some way as a stepping stone for others to look into the beautiful and tragic history of Indigenous resistance. It’s not so much an issue of “primitive” or civilized revolts, but a question of whether you are fighting civilization or not.

My deepest inspiration and solidarity goes out to those who have recognized this as their enemy and have resisted without hesitation.

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*Endnotes*

1. Many of whom are continually involved in armed revolt, for more information check out Do or Die no. 8 or contact Solidarity South Pacific: c/o sdef! Prior house, Tilbury Place, Brighton, E. Sussex, BN2 2GY, UK or [www.eco-action.org/ssp](http://www.eco-action.org/ssp).

2. It is important in order to draw out the differences between

Indigenous and civilized resistance here by pointing out that Indigenous resistance has always been primarily brought about by prophets as opposed to ideologues. Their connection is generally brought about by appeals to “return to old ways,” and the power of these movements is vital as it speaks to the inner character of indigenous culture as it remains throughout the individuals. It speaks to them as people who have known themselves or are still connected rather than speaking to something entirely alien to their being.

3. Eve Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972. Pg 73.
4. As has been the case throughout Latin America, Russia, etc. Indigenous peoples and peasants are generally the strong arm of resistance and they are left off or killed when they are seen as useless or have achieved the goals of the vanguard.
5. For more on this, read ‘Insurrection and/or Revolution,’ also in this book.

# It's Time to Disorganize!

If there's anything that the failures of the Left—particularly the unions (from the UAW and AFL-CIO to the IWW)—has taught us, it's that any "revolutionary" theory that doesn't question the key elements of civilization is going to do nothing more than shift the social order to a slightly modified version. That is, if they work at all. We can no longer look to any kind of reform for an end to the death machine that is civilization. It has long been an embedded idea in revolutionary strands that success requires organization. The age-old calls of the Wobblies, "It's time to organize!" are ringing hollow as the Leftist milieu grinds themselves into the pages of dead social movements in radical history.

What has our past of organization brought us? We can say that it has brought us? Some success because those at the top of the newly created social hierarchies tell us we have won this? Organization pushes us back into the same top-down hierarchies that we are trying to revolt against and erase. What will this bring us? Goodbye old boss, hello to the new—any difference? Maybe there will be a mild greening (or, more likely, reddening), but it's still the same social order, which never brings into question our inherently destructive civilized lifestyles. Even in the short run, they offer little more than pushing forward new leaders to tell us how and when to act out and how and when we've won. It's getting us nowhere. Little, Lefty reformist games comprised of a lot of talk and no action. "Consensus" meetings held behind closed doors by chosen or predetermined delegates will lay out the guidelines of how much reform the masses will stand behind. We have no choice

in the matter and don't realize the two-faced realities of those espousing empty rhetoric. It has not and will not get us anywhere.

If we do truly desire an end to the civilized social order, we can do so only by enacting insurrection and revolt by means that keeps no aspect of the current social order or push for a system that mirrors this. The only hope we have is for spontaneous acts of revolt to come from the passions and rage of individuals. No top down orders or plans for action can wake the insurgent drowned out by the totality of civilized thought.

The only true and successful revolution will not be brought about by predetermined games of give, give, borrow, silent marches and banners, and especially new hierarchies. It will come from the hearts of those who bear the blows of civilization (which is all of us, including non-humans). Those whose dreams are shattered, those who will never live autonomously, unrestrained from the totality of the civilized concrete cages we are born into. Those who have been shut off at birth from their birthright to flourish as individuals and a community, and from the community of nature that would offer them more love than we can conceive in our current downtrodden state. The failures of all hierarchies are becoming clearer daily. The constant collapse of the social order from its overbearing weight will draw more to find their catalyzing points, and thus to their own revolts. Insurgence is rising, and civilization is falling. Give it the final shove by using your own words and actions. Breaking the spell of civilized order is the only way to finish off Leviathan, and every day is bringing us closer.

2001

# Class Struggle, Commodification, and Modernized Society

*Forget those commies, I don't want to work in their factories. Why is it that all these intellectuals and rich college kids think work is cool...It's only people who have never worked at a dead end job with no future that thinks us working class people give a shit who runs the factory. Work is work; no matter if the boss is a capitalist or all of us.*

-Craig E. quoted in *Essays Towards a New Eco-Anarchism*<sup>1</sup>

Is class struggle still relevant? The relics of decaying Leftist movements would still like us to hold onto this bit of his-story long past its due. As the anti-State publication *Black Star North* claims, “Suggestions that class struggle is no longer relevant to revolutionary theory and practice should be met with high suspicion. Those who make such claims are either naïve, misguided, or middle/upper class and unwilling to confront their privilege.”<sup>2</sup>

Class struggle undoubtedly has its specific origins within the rise of industrial society. Built up through the stages of society culminating in a turn towards production from food rearing and to specialization within the varying fields of material goods, which accent the idealistic wealth of the times. Agrarian societies certainly had their rich, but most class warriors will focus their attention towards the industrial age that follows: a detail that will always cause a major problem of historical analysis in the class struggle perspective.

### *The Rise and Fall of Class Struggle*

The rise of class struggle, in the industrial sense that it is most commonly referred to, comes along during the age of increasing mechanization and automation. A steady increase from human-based power sources to machine-based. The technological “advancements” made during this progression made a huge impact on the degrees of severity felt by the working class (the producers). Needless to say, this was accompanied by increasing profits for the upper class (the owners).

It seems extremely important to recognize the differences between the societies of that time and now. The consumer society we live in is a world apart from the periods of industrialization. Granted, the same situations still exist, but have changed in scale. Considering that the industrial process has not yet been fully automated, but relocated into the extending “labor pools” of Second and Third World peoples, thanks to our globalizing economy. The vast amounts of labor required by industrial production, and the little amount of wealth left off to the working class, made such nuances as general stores and vast shopping areas close to nonexistent. The service sector was therefore a mere percentage of the workers, compared to our current society in which this makes up the majority of work being done.

This constant force of dividing labor into more mundane and meaningless positions has completely altered the face of the work force. The worker in our modern, stratified society has become even further alienated than the pre-Ford assembly line factory models that Marx spoke of. The effect, in turn, has caused an even greater loss of individual meaning in a society flooded with workerist ethics. The entire scenario was hardly even something to be considered in the times of social uprising prior to the Second World War, despite the major steps towards modernization being made throughout the 1800s up until this time of “material prosperity.” Or, as more commonly misconstrued, the “affluent society.”<sup>3</sup> This is the society in which we—the privileged first world, who most likely make up the entire readership of this essay—exist. It seems appallingly apparent that we have moved into post-industrial society, a step which the socialist currents have patently rejected.

*Industrial and Post-Industrial Workers*

The industrial worker, slaving away for an hourly wage, is a commodity. This is indisputable.

The economy turns us all into prostitutes for the capitalists, merely renting our bodies and abilities for the designated economic value. Always in light of capitalist demands or those they have cleverly crafted for the yearning workers—which of course, is all we really are within the religion of economics. In the period spawned by the times of industrialization, we became even further alienated as commodity. The intrinsic capitalist interests in having producers are of a different nature than the capitalist interests in consumers, a more tender breed. While the latter requires more attention and gratification, the industrial worker requires a stricter domination of their social position in the physical sense.

This is central to an understanding of our current dilemma.

The industrial worker has a clear function within the realm of production. The workerist ethics of our society are born of this situation, and therefore, the industrial worker will be prone to a larger sentiment of solidarity within that context. Doing something so inherent to this way of life creates a profound sense of worth for a large portion of the vanishing industrial working class. All this despite the blows made to this by the increasing roles of specialization and automation. But it is the identity of the industrial worker that is idealized by the roots of class struggle.

The Ford model assembly line of production has been one of the more severe forms of modernization within the factories. And it serves as an example of the sentiments held by a post-industrial society. Further highlighted by increasingly economic stratification, with a constantly rising standard of living accompanied by further movement towards the opposition of the ultra-rich and their bastard child, the ultra-poor. This has only been aided by the atmosphere of corporate assimilated unions, which carries forth a greater blow towards notions of worker solidarity and nurtures the disillusionments of capitalist fantasies.<sup>4</sup>

The industrial worker was well aware of their role in industrial society as their most recognized value was as a producer. This creates a contingency within the working class, which was easily identified, and even more easily aligned with. It is clear to see that such a context will only bring rise to worker solidarity, of a oneness

through the community of exploited. The industrial worker of this era was definitely a commodity to the capitalist system, but within that system, there existed a community, which produced its own value system.

There was a definition and multifaceted existence of a working class; it was clear and apparent to everyone. Such notions as class-consciousness were hardly radical or economic fringe notions, but a daily reality that could be seen everywhere. It should be no surprise that socialist, communist and syndicalist ideologies would find a place within that era. Yet, contemporary class strugglers aren't willing to let this go. For some the working class remains a constant infallible section of society that no matter what happens, they have their working class solidarity. It is likely such never existed, but any radical theory is going to have to be realistic about the situation they are in and just whom they are dealing with.

### *The Death of Class Consciousness*

The ideals of class struggle—that movement that a conscious, working class could take over the means of production and base a society “each to their own needs, from their own abilities”—are of course contextual. Not to overlook what should be obvious, but they are also faulty. As we can see from a plentitude of perspectives in hindsight, including the environmental effects of industrial society as a whole on the planet and individual, the failures in China and Russia, to mention the major ones.

The general mood of the industrial era was going with the flow of the capitalist vision of constant progression and a sense of worth tied to the industrial system. There were some obvious exceptions, such as the Luddites. The permeating notions of progress—with its emphasis on the level of productivity and its standard of living—were taken as the norm. The working class was usually a bit more optimistic about the distribution of wealth accumulated, but they failed to realize the limits to industrialism weren't merely tied to capitalist conceptualizations. The outcomes of such a hypothetical, more evenly distributed society would still be as lethal as our own. The most conflicting aspect of class struggle and our current reality lies here.

The times have drastically changed and the attitudes of class-consciousness that were once flagrant in an industrial society

have been lost into the pages of his-story. Where there was once a position in society that a mass of people could relate to, there now exists a field of competition and the lines have all been blurred. There is no discernible working class that can or does identify with the mass collectivized movements that characterized class struggles. Even if such a group did exist, there are few means of productions remaining for them to take over.

There is undoubtedly a large portion of the population, just within the belly of the beast, who would definitively constitute a “lower class.” The entire notion of work has been completely revamped to fit with the new economy, the almost fully automated workplace, and the ever-expanding realm of the service sector. It is very unlikely to find a solid mass of enthusiastic proletarians working in supermarkets and outlet malls. Are there some remnants of organizing labor and class-consciousness? Yes, but the large portion of Marxists and class warriors are not out in the mainstream, but in academic pockets of universities or the downsizing remains of factories. There is a reason behind this, that simply is that the exploitation is all still there, but there no longer remains a massive community that those workers can relate too. The entire face of work has been forever changed.

### *The Effects of Commodification*

The new forms of wage slavery have had profound effects on the contemporary worker. Long gone are working situations in which one can expect to be in the same place in 10, 20, or more years. Although who really wants to be? The centuries of being valued in terms of productivity, output, and all the other economic equations of degradation, have scared the mind to think only in those terms. The bounty of being the “affluent society” has left us with a whole new set of institutions to further alienate and mediate our existence. And the backlashes have been unforeseeable.

A solution to eliminating child labor—forced schooling—has been another deprivation of childhood; the most important time for personal development and laying out the limitations of one’s own future.<sup>5</sup> Not that work should ever be considered the alternative; the civilized solution to the original problem has hardly helped the image of the word “humane.” In the US, children are forced to spend the majority of their days until the age of 16-18 within the

confines of one of the more efficient socializing devices available, the school system.

It is within this institution that children are soaked with the glorious, self-gratifying his-stories of “their” own trials and tribulations. From the beginning of the day, when they are subjected to the pledge of allegiance, through mind-numbing hours of conditioning to the scientific, reductionist state of mind. The world is laid out flat on paper, as the maps of empire, subjected to the simplistic equations of mathematicians, the imperial dialect of language, the etiquette of proper domestication, and the pride of being part of the greatest nation to ever grace the face of that flattened planet, depicted by graphs. The end goal is to come out as a product of the capitalist system. The well-rounded consumer: the tuned, efficient worker to further the cause of progress.

In this, we end up in distinguishable social classes. However, the subjective classes of today are very much different from the social standings of industrial society.

The citizens of post-industrial society are not the conscious industrial worker by any stretch of the imagination. The end product of the early socializing pattern is eager and ambitious. No longer going to be content with a set social standing, but constantly looking up and forward into a dreamy future of becoming wealthy.

To be a part of the economy today is far from that of the inclusive workers of industrialism, and anyone who has been subjected to this degradation knows it. The contemporary workers are hardly subject to any concrete orientation or job category. If we attempt to draw lines as to who belongs where, we find more people believe that they belong to the middle class than anything. The truth of the matter is that the structure of our society does actually have loopholes that make it possible for the poorest of poor to become super-rich. In fact, such occurrences are highlighted excessively to keep such a loophole as being seen as a possibility for all. The reality being that capitalism will always require its shit pool to rob at will, generally consisting of the natural environment, but always inclusive of the poor—poverty itself being the creation of such an intrinsic capitalist need.

In modernized society, there are no set lines. That is the selling point of the “free market.” Essentially anything is possible, but the reality—as class struggle’s advocates have constantly kept in light—is that the whole society is unjust. The capitalist system

is dependent upon its infrastructure of exploitation. This should come as little surprise to most readers here, which could be seen as a kind of monument to the past “fellow workers” dedicated to the class revolt. The notion of set social classes in modernized society has less base in reality as all lines are being blurred as the upsurge of capitalist-utopia delusions flood the common vision, better sold as “our future.”

In almost every aspect within our current condition, commodification has succeeded with the influx of misguided notions that we can all be rich. Whatever forms that notion reappears; the individual in consumer society sees the world in terms of capitalist value. The notion that food grows on trees is not seen as much of a truth, but a pipe dream, and generally a not very preferable one. The new domestication—enslavement to a hyper-technological society—has taught us that food is not something that exists freely, but can be purchased freely at the many convenient supermarkets that have become a sick satire of the simplicity of finding food in pre-agrarian society.

There are, and always will be, exceptions to this. The many “revolutionaries” that live off the fringes of our urban lifestyles are as much dependent on this way of life as those who sell their lives away at an hourly wage. While the sickness of existing in such a world is surely clearly different, one cannot realistically suggest that a large-scale, revolutionary current of dumpster diving and/or stealing food offers a genuine alternative.

The simple truth of the matter is that our society is not any kind of strictly class-based society, regardless of how academics and social theorists map it out. Such a notion is not merely coming from a refusal to confront anyone’s own privileges, but from taking in the obvious observation that our society is structured in a completely unique manner. As with all capitalist systems, the rich are becoming richer, and the poor are becoming poorer. This alone, however, is by no means any indication that class will be, or should be, the determining factor for insurrection or revolution. People know that they’re being fucked, the poor know who is rich, but there is no more community in belonging to any social class. Everyone is looking for that way out and credit makes it possible to look like you’ve found one. This is why class struggle has continually lost its large-scale devotion and is only met by more cynicism.

The passive nihilism of consumption has absorbed and resold

us as many packages of helplessness as can be imagined. It is always possible to break through that domesticated mentality, but the attempts to do so through a movement as dated as class struggle has hardly proven to be much of a solution to the problems intrinsic to this way of life. You only need to spend a little time with the working class of our society (the extreme poor being another class) to realize that there is little interest with re-arising as a massive class determined to take the means of production and distribution into their own hands. That framework is, largely, gone. The drive to find avenues to venture further into the patently optimistic self-reflection of our society—pounded in with the required capitalist reminder that “we have never had it so good”—the downtrodden of our society will be more prone to taking this to heart. Social situations aren’t taken as a way of life, but as an indication of the effort put into “bettering” a situation. The scenario has succeeded in drawing many further into the beast than making radicals or class-conscious individuals. The stratification of social standing has only furthered alienation from collective efforts in exchange for a bloodthirsty lust for competition.

### *The Dangers of Industrial Society*

There is no sanctuary in an idealized world of industrialism. From the onset of industrialization, the romanticism of industrial workers was always on a collision course with the disasters that accompany industrialized societies, which place such excess pressure on both the environment and the individuals. This way of living—exemplified with our current society with its path laid out well before the industrial era—has an internalized mechanism that will always cause its own downfall. That is the aspect of continual growth: a constant for civilized societies. An industrial system is based upon readily available and replicable systems of agriculture to provide for the workers no longer tied to food production.

With industrialism, we have a situation in which the necessary resources pertaining to food production and distribution have moved from being the baseline for work, to becoming a support network for the newly emerging realms of production.

Capitalism, a symptom of the civilization that sprouts it, has always been dependent on a centralized system of distribution. Power is granted to those in the center: the government, the corporations.

In this sense, residuals of power are no longer left with those who merely produce food. The development of new technologies and methods, involving and based upon automation, has been built upon century-old systems of production. This has brought about a climate of greater manipulation to enhance production. On the face of it, the age-old problem of providing adequate food is being dealt with. But the overall ecological impacts are only out of sight, to only later reappear to give a good kick in the ass. This however, may not cause immediate problems for a society, which gives capitalists a cause to celebrate in believing that they have solved the problem of infinite hunger on a finite world. At best, it's quite the preemptive celebration.

History has shown that the problem with overcoming this hurdle is that excesses of food have come hand-in-hand with expansions in population. The system is faulty; there are few means to essentially check population growth. As the span of human life slowly ticks back up within mass society, primarily in the vastly growing industrial cities, it has been met with increasingly common occurrences of disease outbreaks. In any other society, this would essentially be one method of keeping the population in check. In turn, the civilized response has been to consistently ignore the warnings, find a quick solution and carry on full speed. The problem of increasing immunity to super antibiotics should come as no surprise, our modern medicine is meant to heal only in the most superficial immediate sense of the word. We are constantly faced with the downfalls of that approach.

What this means is that industrialized living, without any kind of massively implemented program of population limitations, will always be bound to the situation of constant growth. These programs—failures even in a historical sense—lean towards fascist tendencies. The likelihood of their potential success can only be weighed against how fascismistically these programs sought to “weed out” populations. The costly effects of which have been dealt with in great deals elsewhere. There simply cannot be sustainable or suitable industrial society, which is the only ideal society for the outcomes of class struggle. It’s becoming increasingly apparent that we shouldn’t even be looking for ways to make one happen.

The problem is not who is the boss—be it an individual, a corporation, or the majority of the working class—but that we have to work at all. We are always looking for the path of least resistance. Communal work is still work, especially when it feeds other producers and consumers.

Every bit of work we do feeds the alienation that accompanies life within our increasingly synthetic reality. That is especially true should the would-be victorious class strugglers attempt to maintain cities. There is hardly anything that can be done anymore where a person can see production all of the way through. There is very little sowing and reaping of harvests in cities, or any kind of sustaining project. The larger the society, the less meaningful work there is to be done. There will always be those little things that become necessary in order to provide for the whole. It will therefore always be someone's job to produce and maintain every little thing. Any way you look at this, it will always be work. It is not much of a stretch to see the possible joy of communal food gathering, but less so when it comes to food production. It is really a stretch to think that there will be that same feeling of enthusiasm and joy for building tractors and all the mundane shit work that would have to make such an event possible. This is a realistic feat that class strugglers have downplayed. Granted, a post-capitalist or post-civilization situation is going to be filled with obstacles, but it seems clear that some are easier to just skip entirely: the industrial system itself being one of the more obvious of candidates.

### *The Transitory Dilemma*

It is not uncommon to hear of class struggle as a means to an end. As has been shown in the previous pages, however, that seems very debatable outside of certain industrialist areas. This brings light to the whole notion of possible transitions from a capitalist or civilized order, a constant sore spot in revolutionary theory. It seems that to merely have a vision of what is likely or possible must be accompanied by a play-by-play scenario with how to jump from here to there. That aspect of revolutionary theory seems, at most, to be almost completely useless as any kind of praxis. The failure of revolutions have hardly been due to a lack of guidelines, but exceedingly more common is the failure of oversight.

This aspect of theory is where we will most likely find the

unnoticed traces of civilized thought that we refuse to let go. For some reason or another, the possibility of revolution occurring spontaneously is always upheld, but moving beyond is hardly given much credit. Transitory theories are laid out from every angle, but why is it that we think that those theories will work? In most cases, it seems that those stages are a progression of dispatching certain vices of capitalism. For class struggle, that vice would be the notion of a ruling class, bosses. For others, those vices could be centralized governing structures; some could be schools, some could be work, but what could really be more utopian than the thought that there will be some massive, voluntary downgrading of civilized vices? Why do we think we could get so far, but still need this and that, or that something will spark in people and put them in the position to be “enlightened” into groupthink?

I would never claim to possess any special or original knowledge on the subject, but it seems that if we are serious about taking out this way of life, that it would do us much better to work at dismantling all this in as many ways as we can. I don’t think making up possible scenarios for what may happen will be as successful as attempting to take this whole thing out of commission. Not that anyone can do that, but if there is going to be anything, why not that? We live in a very fucked up society, and there is arguably more depression and alienation now than ever, but people aren’t going to always just give up on it. And no matter what anyone thinks, the grip they have from a capitalist society isn’t going to stop the inevitable collapse from happening. It seems apparent that any realistic revolutionary praxis would lie in welcoming the inevitable and working to make the crash not as harsh as it could be.

I will be the last to say that many transitory actions are worthless. Certain acts, especially permaculture and other attempts to help rewild our lives and our bioregions, are absolutely vital to the permanence of this planet and life on it. Movements that attempt to stop civilization from destroying all wildness play an extremely important role. Actions that seek to help people overcome the alienation and depravation of our mediated life are some of the most important ones. These are all important things, but we should always take them just as what they are: things that lessen the blow and make life more meaningful again.

The problem that has commonly been overlooked—or in even worse scenarios, assimilated—by class strugglers is that the new nations that are being brought into the global economy are intrinsically different from our own situation. For class struggle to have any real meaning to those who are in the processes of being colonized, they would have to move further into the capitalist economy and continue the process of industrialization. Marx and Engels had been known to suggest that they should do so. So the destined path of humans, as pushed by the colonizers, remains that progress and development are the reason for our existence. Even from the supposed resistance movements within the First-World nations, the colonized are given no chance to remain autonomous.<sup>6</sup>

Is the above situation a necessary aspect of class struggle? Not necessarily, but nonetheless, it is an indication of the limits that class struggle offers, and highlights the minute contextual basis that it currently holds. This is what globalizing capitalism is working off of, and further evidence of the need for a total revolution against civilization. There are no more means of production that exist to be taken over, or at least any that would provide any kind of sustenance for societies, unless they remain within the globalized economy.

It simply is not going to provide any good for the sweatshops to be seized by the workers, the clerks to seize control of the convenience stores, the relocated farm hands to seize the control of the harvest, the rig workers to seize control of an offshore oil rig. The examples could go on, but they all point to one thing, that is the inevitable fatality of this way of life. If we are going to move beyond this, it is going to have to be something intrinsically different from the direction we are heading.

### *Contemporary Revolt*

To conclude, we come back to the initial question of, “is class struggle still relevant?” It seems, based on a more broad-based analysis of our current situation, that class struggle is relevant, but that its relevance is becoming increasingly less important to the end of our current exploitative framework. The role of class struggle, as a historical and cumulative effort, will forever be apart of revolt against civilization. The State is best maintained by a fluid changing of situations, as a form of progression, but also serves a

greater function of severing the movements of revolt from their earlier forms. With this understanding, we must always consider that changing times require new perspectives against the common delusions of things being forever better than before. Such is the way that the totality of civilized thought seeks to eradicate and neutralize any radical currents into a state of passive nihilism and further assimilation into the faceless masses of existence.

The present, in its current standings and the resistance to it, has been shaped by the history of class struggle, on top of all those who throughout the past of civilized existence have fought to keep the megamachine from expanding. I'm personally reminded of these things on a daily basis, as is everyone within our society so prone to building monuments to itself. Here in western Pennsylvania, within range of Pittsburgh, one can everywhere see the his-storyical jabs that the capitalists have made. Not far from here is Carnegie-Mellon University, across the city is Carnegie Science Center, throughout the city and surrounding areas you will find the many parks, hospitals and buildings named after Henry Clay Frick. One who is aware of these industrialists' past and their deadly social endeavors, the community contributions of Frick and his Pinkertons lay great example, can only feel a greater solidarity for such class warriors as Alexander Berkman for making their stand and literally taking a shot at the capitalist system.

Revolt against this system will always require critical analysis with a stress on historical resistance, but we can never dwell upon anyone more than others. We are people with a plentitude of origins that create our subjective reality. It seems apparent that revolt aimed at dismantling the giant beast of civilization will require constant adaptation to the current situation. So perhaps the initial question should not be of the relevance of class struggle, but the role in which class society has played in the creation of our current society and how that may help us dismantle it.

2002

*Endnotes*

1. Chris Kortright, *Essays Towards a New Eco-Anarchism*. 2000.
2. 'Towards an Understanding of Class Struggle in the 21st Century', *Black Star North* #3, 2001. Pg. 27.
3. See Clive Ponting, *Green History of the World*. New York: Pen-

guin, 1991.

4. See John Zerzan and Grandizo Munis, *Unions Against Revolution*. Detroit: Black and Red, 1975.
5. See Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1982.
6. This debate has been pursued for some time now, and a bit of it has been well chronicled in Ward Churchill (ed), *Marxism and Native Americans*. Boston: South End Press, 1983.

# To Produce or Not To Produce?

## Class, Modernity, and Identity

Class is a social relationship. Stripped to its base, it is about economics. It's about being a producer, distributor or an owner of the means and fruits of production. No matter what category any person is, it's about identity.

Who do you identify with? Or better yet, what do you identify with? Every one of us can be put into any number of socio-economic categories. But that isn't the question. Is your job your identity? Is your economical niche?

Let's take a step back.

What are economics? My dictionary defines it as: "the science of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services." Fair enough. Economies do exist. In any society where there is unequal access to the necessities of life, where people are dependent upon one another (and more importantly, institutions) there is an economy.

The goal of revolutionaries and reformists has almost always been about reorganizing the economy. Wealth must be redistributed. Capitalist, communist, socialist, syndicalist, what have you, it's all about economics. Why? Because production has been naturalized, science can always distinguish economy, and work is just a necessary evil.

It's back to the fall from Eden, where Adam was punished to till the soil for disobeying God. It's the Protestant work ethic and

warnings of the sin of “idle hands.” Work becomes the basis for humanity. That’s the inherent message of economics.

Labor “is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labor created man himself.” That’s not Adam Smith or God talking (at least this time), that’s Frederick Engels.

But something’s very wrong here. What about the others, beyond the walls of Eden? What about the “savages” who farmers and conquistadors (for all they can be separated) could only see as lazy for not working?

Are economics universal?

Let’s look back at our definition.

The crux of economy is production. So if production is not universal, then an economy cannot be. We’re in luck: it’s not. Those “savage” others beyond the walls of Eden, the walls of Babylon, and the gardens—nomadic hunter-gatherers—produced nothing. A hunter does not produce wild animals. A gatherer does not produce wild plants. They simply hunt and gather. Their existence is give and take, but this is ecology, not economy.

Every one in a nomadic hunter-gatherer society is capable of getting what they need on their own. That they don’t need to is a matter of mutual aid and social cohesiveness, not force. If they don’t like their situation, they change it. They are capable of this and encouraged to do so. Their form of exchange is anti-economy: generalized reciprocity. This simply means that people give anything to anyone whenever. There are no records, no tabs, no tax, and no running system of measurement or worth. Share with others and they share in return.

These societies are intrinsically anti-production, anti-wealth, anti-power, anti-economics. They are simply egalitarian to the core: organic, primal anarchy.

But that doesn’t tell us how we became economic people. How work became identity.

Looking at the origins of civilization does.

Civilization is based off production. The first instance of production is surplus production. Nomadic hunter-gatherers got what they needed when they needed it. They ate animals, insects, and plants. When a number of hunter-gatherers settled, they still hunted animals and gathered plants, but not to eat.

At least, not immediately.

In Mesopotamia, the cradle of our now global civilization, vast fields of wild grains could be harvested. Grain, unlike meat and most wild plants, can be stored without any intensive technology. It was put in huge granaries. But grain is harvested seasonally. As populations expand, they become dependent upon granaries rather than what is freely available.

Enter distribution. The granaries were owned by elites or family elders who were, in turn, in charge of rationing and distributing the stored foods back to the people who filled them. Dependency means compromise: that's the central element of domestication. Grain must be stored. Granary owners store and ration the grain in exchange for increased social status. Social status means coercive power. This is how the State arose.

In other areas, such as what is now the northwest coast of the United States into Canada, storehouses were filled with dried fish rather than grain. Kingdoms and intense chiefdoms were established. The subjects of the arising powers were those who filled the storehouses. This should sound familiar. Expansive trade networks were formed and the domestication of plants and then animals followed the expansion of populations. The need for more grain turned gatherers into farmers. The farmers would need more land and wars were waged. Soldiers were conscripted. Slaves were captured. Nomadic hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists were pushed away and killed.

The people did all of this not because the chiefs and kings said so, but because their created gods did. The priest is as important to the emergence of states as chiefs and kings. At some points they were the same position, sometimes not. But they fed off each other. Economics, politics and religion have always been one system. Nowadays science takes the place of religion. That's why Engels could say that labor is what made humans from apes. Scientifically this could easily be true. God punished the descendants of Adam and Eve to work the land. Both are just a matter of faith.

But faith comes easily when it comes from the hand that feeds. So long as we are dependent on the economy, we'll compromise what the plants and animals tells us, what our bodies tell us. No one wants to work, but that's just the way it is.

So we see in the tunnel vision of civilization. The economy needs to be reformed or revolutionized. The fruit of production

needs redistributed.

Enter class struggle.

Class is one of many relationships offered by civilization. It has often been asserted that the history of civilization is the history of class struggle. But I would argue differently. The relationship between the peasant and the king and between chief and commoner cannot be reduced to one set of categories. When we do this, we ignore the differences that accompany various aspects of civilization. Simplification is nice and easy, but if we're trying to understand how civilization arose so that we can destroy it, we must be willing to understand subtle and significant differences.

What could be more significant than how power is created, maintained and asserted? This isn't done to cheapen the very real resistance that the underclass had against elites, far from it. But to say that class or class-consciousness is universal ignores important particulars.

Class is about capitalism. It's about a globalizing system based on absolute mediation and specialization. It emerged from feudal relationships through mercantile capitalism into industrial capitalism and now modernity.

Proletarian, bourgeoisie, peasant, petite bourgeoisie; these are all social classes about our relationship to production and distribution. Particularly in capitalist society, this is everything. All of this couldn't have been more apparent than during the major periods of industrialization. You worked in a factory, owned it, or sold what came out of it. This was the heyday of class-consciousness because there was no question about it. Proletarians were in the same conditions and for the most part they knew that is where they would always be. They spent their days and nights in factories while the high society of the bourgeoisie was always close enough to smell, but not taste.

If you believed God, Smith, or Engels, labor was your essence. It made you human. To have your labor stolen from you must have been the worst of all crimes. The workers ran the machine and it was within their grasp to take it over. They could get rid of the boss and put in a new one or a workers' council.

If you believed production was necessary, this was revolutionary. And even more so because it was entirely possible. Some people tried it. Some of them were successful. A lot of them were not. Most

revolutions were accused of failing the ideals of those who created them. But in no place did the proletariat resistance end relationships of domination.

The reason is simple: they were barking up the wrong tree. Capitalism is a form of domination, not its source. Production and industrialism are parts of civilization, a heritage much older and far more rooted than capitalism.

But the question is really about identity. The class strugglers accepted their fate as producers, but sought to make the most of a bad situation. That's a faith that civilization requires. That's a fate that I won't accept. That's a fate the Earth won't accept.

The inevitable conclusion of the class struggle is limited because it is rooted in economics. Class is a social relationship, but it is tied to capitalist economics. Proletarians are identified as people who sell their labor. Proletarian revolution is about taking back your labor. But I'm not buying the myths of God, Smith, or Engels. Work and production are not universal and civilization is the problem.

What we have to learn is that link between our own class relationships and those of the earlier civilizations is not about who is selling labor and who is buying, but it is about the existence of production itself. About how we came to believe that spending our lives building power that is wielded against us is justified. About how compromising our lives as free beings to become workers and soldiers became a compromise we were willing to take.

It is about the material conditions of civilization and the justifications for them, because that is how we will come to understand civilization. So we can understand what the costs of domestication are, for ourselves and the Earth. So that we can destroy it for once and for all.

This is what the anarcho-primitivist critique of civilization attempts to do. It's about understanding civilization, how it is created and maintained. Capitalism is a late stage of civilization and class struggle as the resistance to that order is all extremely important to both our understanding of civilization and how to attack it.

There is a rich heritage of resistance against capitalism. It is another part of the history of resistance against power that goes back to its origins. But we should be wary to not take any stage as the only stage. Anti-capitalist approaches are just that, anti-capitalist. They are not anti-civilization. They are concerned with a certain

type of economics, not the economy, production, or industrialism itself. An understanding of capitalism is only useful in so far as it is historically and ecologically rooted.

But capitalism has been the major target of the past centuries of resistance. As such, the grasp of class struggle is apparently not easy to move on from. Global capitalism was well rooted by 1500 AD and continued through the technological, industrial and green revolutions of the last 500 years, but primarily only within the last hundred. With a rise in technology, it has spread throughout the planet to the point where there is now only one global civilization. But capitalism is still not universal. If we see the world as a stage for class struggle, we are ignoring the many fronts of resistance that are explicitly resisting civilization. This is something that class struggle advocates typically ignore, but in some ways only one of two major problems. The other problem is the denial of modernity.

Modernity is the face of late capitalism. It's the face that has been primarily spreading over the last 50 years through a series of technological expansions that have made the global economy as we know it now possible. It is identified by hyper-technology and hyper-specialization.

Let's face it; the capitalists know what they are doing. The threat of proletariat revolution was never so strongly felt as it was in the period leading up to World War I and through World War II. Both wars were fought in part to break this revolutionary spirit.

But it didn't end there. In the post-war periods the capitalists knew that any kind of major restructuring would have to work against that level of class-consciousness. Breaking the ability to organize was central. Our global economy made sense not only in economic terms, but in social terms. The concrete realities of class cohesion were shaken. Most importantly, with global production, a proletarian revolution couldn't feed and provide for itself. This is one of the primary causes for the failure of the socialist revolutions in Russia, China, Nicaragua, and Cuba, to name just a few.

The structure of modernity is anti-class consciousness. In industrialized nations, most of the work force is service oriented. People could very easily take over any number of stores and Wal-Marts, but where would this get us? The periphery and core of modern capitalism are spread across the world. A revolution would have to be global, but would it look any different in the end? Would it be any more desirable?

In industrializing nations, which provide almost everything that the core needs, the reality of class-consciousness is very real. But the situation is much the same. We have police and are forced to fall in line; they have an everyday reality of military intervention. The threat of state retaliation is much more real and the force of core states to keep those people in line is something most of us probably can't imagine. But even should revolt be successful, what good are mono-cropped fields and sweatshops? The problem runs much deeper than what can be achieved by restructuring production.

But, in terms of the industrial nations, the problem runs even deeper. The spirit of modernity is extremely individualistic. Even though that alone is destroying everything it means to be human, that's what we're up against. It's like lottery capitalism: we believe that it is possible for each of us to strike it rich. We're just looking out for number one. We'll more than happily get rich or die trying.

The postmodern ethos that defines our reality tells us that we have no roots. It feeds our passive nihilism that reminds us that we're fucked, but there's nothing we can do about it. God, Smith, and Engels said so, now movies, music, and markets remind us.

The truth is that in this context proletarian identity has little meaning. Classes still exist, but not in any revolutionary context. Study after study shows that most Americans consider themselves middle class. We judge by what we own rather than what we owe on credit cards. Borrowed and imagined money feeds an identity, a compromise, that we're willing to sell our souls for more stuff.

Our reality runs deeper than proletarian identity can answer. The anti-civilization critique points towards a much more primal source of our condition. It doesn't accept myths of necessary production or work, but looks to a way of life where these things weren't just absent, but where they were intentionally pushed away.

It channels something that can be increasingly felt as modernity automates life. As development tears at the remaining ecosystems. As production breeds a completely synthetic life. As life loses meaning. As the Earth is being killed.

I advocate primal war. But this is not an anti-civilization form of class war. It's not a tool for organizing, but a term for rage. A kind of rage felt at every step of the domestication process. A kind of rage that cannot be put into words. The rage of the primal self subdued by production and coercion. The kind of rage that will not be compromised.

## To Produce or To Not Produce?

The kind of rage that can destroy civilization.

It's a question of identity.

Are you a producer, distributor, owner, or a human being?

Most importantly, do you want to reorganize civilization and its economics or will you settle for nothing less than their complete destruction?

2004

# Revolution and/or Insurrection

Right now, our society exhibits every major characteristic necessary for revolution. Historian James DeFronzo has laid out the common factors working for a “successful” revolution<sup>1</sup> (though all five are hardly ever all at work at once); mass dissent, elite dissent, unifying motive, state crisis, and world permissiveness.<sup>2</sup> It takes no professional or specialist to see the bulk of these factors at work here and now.

Revolution is the response to a change in standards in almost all categories of social life within a given system. Traditionally this has occurred during a period of modernization where the State has been a bar from reaching the potential that its citizens feel they are due (rightly or wrongly). They occur at points when social stratification is at an extreme and the masses are increasingly being marginalized.

The interests here are not in pouring over or disputing the work of “experts” and theorists, but to look at common elements of revolution and our society and question what some possibilities are for revolution or if it’s even desirable.

*The point here isn’t to reach some vanguard, movement, or organization goal, but to look into some possibilities that our current situation opens up and point to the possibilities for autonomous resistance.*

## *Nihilistic Rage*

The “mass dissent” that DeFronzo points to is not only present,

but defining of our times, although it is concealed under mass frustration or a nihilistic rage. People are pissed off, and they know it, but they don't know whom to blame. Experts and specialists have come up with more theories and solutions to this occurrence than any of us would have any interest in following up on. These experts have typically avoided the issue by missing what is right in front of their eyes: this world we have made for ourselves gives us no reason to live and no reason to die.

This world of mega-technology and ultra-alienation seeks to destroy all that is human inside of us, as Arthur Evans describes it:

*The whole industrial system is like one great night of the living dead where the entire populace has been reduced emotionally to the level of zombies. It has deadened us to our environment, deprived us of art, sterilized our animal nature, robbed us of the skills of survival, degraded our labor and leisure, and decimated our sexual lives. And so it has made us like the living dead – dead to nature, dead to each other, dead to ourselves.<sup>3</sup>*

We've been domesticated to a new world order of lifeless servitude, obsessed with a machine-run future. All the events in our life that give us meaning have been automated and we are left as the mechanics for the machine that will devour or bore us to death.

What we are seeing in our society are the many forms of "survival sickness" that Raoul Vaneigem spoke of.<sup>4</sup> A rage and misery sweeps over society in a splurge of happiness and niceism. Everywhere in this society is the big smiley face of hyper-capitalism to soothe all the unrest and dysfunction. John Zerzan notes that the "face of domination is often a smiling one,"<sup>5</sup> as a surreal wave of etiquette wipes out all direct flow of rage and contempt.

We are in a society of potential psychopaths who are continuously bottling up rage. Our domestication teaches us to internalize it, to bite the bullet and go with the flow. The teachers tell us that nothing good comes from letting it all out.

The youths are getting restless though. Children younger and younger are having uncontrollably violent outbreaks and the only solution is to sedate them. Yet this solution has only resulted in more insane chemical reactions and we aren't seeing any halt to the sporadic episodes of youth murder. But is this just pushing a button, or is there something here? It seems that we are all suffering,

we all live in Disneyland and Columbine at the same time. Pointing out this downward spiral isn't just listing off the worst of what happens, but showing how common this has become, and that it is everywhere and it is all of us.

The mass dissent that fuels revolution is here but the Spectacle has kept it as isolated outbreaks and incidents and as group therapy and personal problems. Our rage is collective, but we have been so heavily domesticated to ignore it or push it aside. Perhaps the key to unlocking and channeling this dissent is to realize that we are not alone in our misery and that it has a common source. We have enough rage burning us inside that we could tear this shit down tonight.

### *Surreal Power Games*

Recent corporate and political turns, downfalls, and whistle blowing only add to the surreal reality that has been crafted.<sup>6</sup> When we see top politicians and other fuckers turning on each other, we have to wonder what's going on.

The more I've learned of every one of these fuckers, the more clear it remains that they are no longer humans. The seed of power corrupts absolutely and it corrupts to death, and all of these power mongers are infested beyond return. They are all guilty of the crimes that they have defined, but when they turn on each other, what does that say?

In the past years there has been an increasing amount of unrest among the elites. They are getting bloodthirsty and the results are just all the more entertaining. I really have no interest in seeing any of these bastards come out on top, but I don't mind them eliminating themselves, although the result is only increased power holdings. But this is just capitalism playing itself out.

Regardless of whatever the background of these odd turns may be, it is obvious that there is massive elite dissent. The power mongers are shaking things up, and when the cradle rocks, the cradle will fall. While the elites play power games, the breeding grounds for revolution open up. The question remains, what will you do with this opening space?

### *Tired of Repression?*

A “unifying motive” has always been the most complicated factor for revolutions. The reason for this is simple: the city and its counterpart, the countryside, limit human and ecological sanity. We have been raised as dependents of this system and, because of this, only so many are ready to turn elsewhere. The blinders are in place to keep us from seeing where we’ve come from and where we’re going. But this opens up a far more serious problem: Where are people looking? What is it that they want?

In my eyes, this problem has been the fatal flaw of all past revolutions. The most divisive factor in this society is the capitalist myth that we can all get a piece of the pie if we just try harder and that this would be desirable.

We are oblivious to the implications of this plastic and metal reality because our eyes are glued on the prize: the constantly rising ceiling for wealth. A friend points to what this all boils down to:

*Both the fucked and the fuckers have 1) the same idea of life, 2) the same ideology of Needs, 3) the same attitude of the whole non-human world. Both classes believe in Progress, in further “development of productive forces” as the only rational answer to the disaster caused with all previous “developments of productive forces.” They dream about the same commodities, same paradise.<sup>7</sup>*

So long as we have been embodied by Capital (the world of commodity, work, and development), we will ignore the path of civilization that is at work here: slavery and sacrifice to some other great order.

As Jacques Camatte pointed out, a successful revolution will bring about a new mode of life, not a new mode of production.<sup>8</sup> The goal in finding a unifying motive would have to lie in awakening the “wandering humanity” to the reality of their domestication.

It seems that a serious and full revolution will occur once the people realize their desires and potential within the realm of whole communities. Whole communities, however, can not exist so long as civilization—the combination of institutionalized division of labor, alienation, and hierarchical, systemic power which requires a constantly growing “resource pool” to continue existing—haunts them. Civilization must constantly expand to continue existing, and its power lies in an internalized totality (symbolic culture) and external institutions/forces. Any threat to the well being of its

totality is a threat to civilization, and threats are met with repression or destruction. So the target is neither solely a mental nor a physical one, but an assault on all fronts.

This isn't to say that people should be unified towards a single goal or society, but under the principle of autonomy and realizing their own self-determination. This isn't a prescription for mass society, but it is the one thing that we all have in common: we are all slaves to the will of civilization so long as it exists.

We return to the mass dissent mentioned earlier. Perhaps the unifying motive is a channeling of the rage and misery that lies beneath the façade of happiness and success. Perhaps a realization of this underlying factor will awaken revolutionaries from the civilized sleep of the work-consume-die reality.

### *State Crisis*

What more could qualify as state crisis than the mounting war efforts? This war, the product of civilization running on emptiness (literally), is the outcome of abusing and destroying the Earth and the relations of all life. The powerful are grabbing at the last drops of oil, air, water, and soil to buy and sell. We are seeing the process of collapse (ecological and social), but this time on a global scale. The mounting situation is possibly a look at the end of civilization.

This situation really doesn't need a lot of elaboration. The kind of political and economic instability occurring here and now is a huge crisis, and we're likely to see the worst outcomes of it. There is really no time better than now to attack the system while it's at its weakest.

What I'm interested in pointing towards here are the possibilities that are opening up while the State is preoccupied with itself. All the major revolutions have taken place as state crises have weakened the power structure. It is at these points that the State's control is predominantly focused on one issue. While the military is off in foreign lands, the State is left with the security that the totality and overbearing nationalism will keep us here at home from questioning what's going on, or rising up to seriously contend its actions. The simplest possibility is usually the one right before you.

### *World Permissiveness or Global Preoccupation*

The “world permissiveness” factor is always problematic, only in rightist/statist revolutions (coups) have the major world powers been there to watch over or turn the other cheek. In all other cases, this remains a serious factor. No other major world power has interest in a trade of hands unless there is an economic incentive for them to do so.

It is possible for a revolutionary force to be successful while under this threat. The Cuban Revolutionary Army was able to defeat U.S. backed attacks after the revolution. But planning is a major factor. The Mexican Revolution was able to succeed because it occurred during World War I while the U.S.—who had immense economic interest in Mexico—was preoccupied.

These are things to take into consideration. We have to look at the world situation as things are and where they are heading. The U.S. is heading towards war with North Korea and Iraq, on top of the “war on terrorism.” These two fronts definitely require the bulk of U.S. armed forces, whose deployment is already underway. North Korea has threatened World War III if the U.S. attacks, even though the possibility has already existed. With the U.S. spread out so thinly, things are still relatively open here. There is the chance of global preoccupation and if the U.S. is falling, it seems there would be plenty of nations with interest in keeping it from coming back. These are all things to take into consideration, albeit it they are all taking chances, but how long are we to sit and wait?

So far, this examination has been regarding revolution, but it should be said that these same principles would apply equally for insurrections or guerilla warfare.

### *Seizure or Abolition of State Power*

As an anarchist, it's easy to see why past revolutions have failed to produce any more desirable reality. As was mentioned earlier, the problem is that the entire terminology of revolution in the past centuries has revolved around capital. Camatte extended the definition of capital to include the entire mode of production and its values. In this respect, capitalism and communism differ only in their methods of pursuit of capital. Through this vision, humans are reduced to capital, or proletarianized, meaning that they are valued only by their potential as labor.

Past revolutions have typically been carried out within this

realm of capital. These revolutions have been the forbearers of modernization, and therefore have sought to only become their own slave drivers. Camatte continues, “Liberation begins with the refusal to perceive oneself in terms of the categories of capital, namely as proletarian, as member of the new middle class, capitalist, etc.”<sup>9</sup>

To continue the process that Camatte has started, it is necessary to follow his understanding of capital as the domesticator to the very source of domestication, civilization. In this we find that domestication comes hand-in-hand with agriculture and division of labor, which are the origins of property and, thus, the State.<sup>10</sup>

From this point, we are in a clearer stance to understand the failures of past revolutions. The source of oppression lies in power itself, not in who holds it. In order to be liberated from these means, it is necessary to destroy power in all respects. So revolution would entail the abolition of power, whereas in the past it has only meant its seizure and redistribution.

This point is vital to an understanding of how we relate with one another. I believe that humans are inherently good beings, but power corrupts absolutely. It doesn't matter the intentions of who is chasing it, once they have it, their will is contested by their ability. It is only a matter of time before power takes over and the Earth and all life become mere pawns for the interests of power.

Past revolutions have been carried out by the means of a mass possessed by the propaganda of collectivity, nationalism and so on. This propaganda remains hollow words once the power has been seized. The people's faith is put entirely on some obscure Ideology or party line. The potential for liberation lies not in the ability to manipulate the masses into some sacrifice for the common good, but in the realization of a way of life that enables all life to realize autonomy and self-determination.

This brings us to a question of the “movement” and interests of revolution.

### *Mass Movement or Autonomous Resistance*

The talk of revolution generally implies that it is in the best interests of those within a given system. Revolution is widely acknowledged as a mass-based uprising with a common goal (as I feel Ted Kaczynski's essay, ‘The Road to Revolution’ aspires). Typically,

this common goal has been organized along the lines of the lowest common denominator of what people might want. The result of this is a larger mass of people, but you have all people reading into the party line or ideology what they want out of it. When you have ideology, you have something that uses a specific agenda and plan for action in order to seize power; the outcome of these movements has always been failure. This applies to the Mexican Revolution, in which people would be propped up under the same banner of nationalism and would only be self serving once in power, causing a revolving door of power and ensuing use of military force to crush those who helped bring those in power to that position. This was the case with the Spanish Revolution as well.

My interests aren't in forming some kind of mass ideology or for some mass changeover in consciousness. From what I've seen from past revolts, the denial of the individual to the "will of the people" has only created soulless revolutionaries. The success of civilization has been in the subjugation of people; successful revolt will only come through their complete liberation. My understanding of past revolutions is essentially one of compromise, and this is an unfavorable aspect that I've skipped over so far. While realizing the potential for revolution, we should keep in mind whether or not one is even desirable. In order to address this it's important to take a step back and to look at what is being dealt with.

The revolution that I'm interested in isn't using propaganda to create a zombie army of those sacrificing themselves so they can perpetuate their own slavery. My interests lie in bringing about a situation where people can realize their full potential. Am I pushing my interests upon people? Perhaps if I was into movement building, but this is far from where I'm heading.

'The Road to Revolution' is a movement-building essay,<sup>11</sup> which addresses important questions of revolutionary discipline, but the methodology is not addressing the internalized technological structures. A revolutionary force will only be viable if it is made up of individuals who have collected on their own terms.

I'm not for any kind of mass-consciousness or mass-anything, in fact, "mass" is one of the underlying problems that comes with civilization. I'm most interested in autonomous resistance. The primacy in this essay on the preconditions for revolution is merely an estimation of the situation we now face. Frankly, I feel that we are seeing the final days of civilization and collapse is inevitable.

However, the way that this beast falls remains up in the air. It most definitely will fall, but whether it is from within or from outside or both is up to us to determine.

The days of the concrete reality that we exist in are numbered. Moving from this will be the act of beings seeking a true connection to the Earth and each other; otherwise it will never be completely obliterated. It is vital to realize that revolution is not an act, but a process. While it is primarily a mass uprising against an existing order, it historically remains as the reconstruction of social relationships. I'm interested in trying to draw on the ecological and evolutionary understanding of the human-animal as an image of what these relations look like. And yet, I'm interested in trying to make this move without ideological restraints. I'm not here to provide answers, only to open questions and possibilities.

### *The Role of Insurrection*

At this point, it becomes vital to speak of insurrection and guerilla warfare.

Insurrection is the act of people who simply refuse to sit by and wait for revolutions. However, like revolution, insurrection has its history of use by those who would rather control their own domestication rather than those who desire autonomy. Regardless, it is important to focus on its use for the purpose of liberation.

Insurrection remains a tactic for those who seek an outlet for their rage against the great domesticating force. Articulated or not, acts of insurrection are powerful not only in their contribution to revolutionary struggle, but also in their refusal of the civilized consciousness, a refusal of the happiness and niceism of capital.

Insurrection becomes all the more vital when channeled beyond the realm of capital and transcends civilization as a whole. Insurrection is one of the most powerful acts of a revolutionary movement since it is “propaganda of the deed.” Not only is an individual or group of people breaking the totality of civilized restrictions, they are empowering others to realize that this is a possibility, that another world awaits if they choose to make it.

History is full of examples of insurrectionary power. The success of a revolt will depend on the ability of an insurrection to show the weaknesses of the state. This was the case with Castro's 26 Julio insurrectionary army. While their individual acts were far

from successful, their continued resistance was an inspiration. After direct assaults upon parts of state power failed, they remained in hiding on the periphery of Cuba with growing support. The Cuban Revolution had less to do with a constant struggle by the 26 Julio Army, but by those within the grips of state power rising up at the same time after the potential for revolt was becoming apparent.

Again, this is an example of the seizure of power, but it was all there if only they would have taken a step further and moved against power. The failure of the Cuban revolt was in their dependence upon existing power structures, seeing their only way to continue existing was to continue plugging in to the world addiction to sugar (their prime cash crop) and under the banner of nationalism, people continued sacrificing their lives to “their nation.” The potential for the abolition of power is still there, it just needs to be actualized.

There is little sign of a revolutionary consciousness against the whole of civilization right now, even though there is every reason to believe that this would be possible. Almost all past revolutions became possible through the existence of guerilla and insurgent forces. Once the groundwork has been laid, it becomes more possible for others to see that there are other options than the future laid out by the domesticators.

It is always taking a risk to be involved in insurrectionary acts of revolt, but this is a question of how serious we are. If we are serious about abolishing this narrow reality, then what is keeping us from trying to realize this? We'll never be sure if revolution will be what takes this down, or if insurrection necessarily spurs individuals to question their domestication, but I know that my interests lie in being a free and full human. Even if all else fails, insurrection is at least taking steps towards this. My question is that if collapse or death is inevitable, what is the harm in at least putting efforts into trying to tear this fucker down in every way? I stand strongly by Fredy Perlman's recognition that “anything can happen,” but it's up to us to ensure that everything is tried.

### *Is Revolution Possible or Preferable?*

While I can only put so much faith in the idea, I see that revolution is entirely possible right now. I look around and I see generations being raised in an entirely synthetic life, and I think of the Lakota Sioux medicine man Lame Deer's estimation that they will

eventually want to be closer to nature, and I think that could be true. There is nothing left for anyone here, all has been automated, outlawed, trivialized, spectacularized, and limited before it got the chance to exist. The youth of today have nothing to live or die for, only to continue the path of shiny new technologies while the world suffers. The pain of the youth pours out as drugs, alcohol, television, and any other addiction that can be bought and sold smother it.

Among these generations, that urge to live is just wasting away. People are dying and killing in order to feel something and they hold onto this world because it is all that they know. The success of domestication comes in keeping everyone from realizing their own sacrifice is for the sake of others. If this can be broken, generations of revolutionaries could exist.

The dire situation we are faced with makes revolution all the more important. It's scary to think what some people are capable of doing if they would have power in their own hands, but revolution is bound to happen. This makes the idea of immediate action seem all the more real. If it does not wipe out the ability of civilization and its domination to continue, there will only be the same old problems.

From my interactions with people, no matter how much shit they face, they all know in some way that civilization is falling. There is really no secret about it, and the times keep on getting worse. The problem here is that people are so completely disempowered that they see no reason to try and resist. A strong insurrectionary surge could serve as a kind of catalyst to redirect all this rage and urge for life that lies just beneath the surface. Revolution isn't handing life to people, but showing them the possibilities.

### *The Technological Infrastructure is the Target*

The possibilities of living wild and free lie in the weaknesses of the state.<sup>12</sup> I recognize that the dis-ease of capital has infected the minds of individuals so much that they would rather die with it than give up material comforts. Thus is the nature of the totality of civilized thought. Many will hold dearly to this system until they recognize that other ways of life are possible, the revolutionary or insurrectionary urge should point towards this potential.

The overriding question is whether it will take a conscious revolution or the precise acts of small groups and individuals to

force this empire down. The bulk of the U.S. won't be willing to question their domestication until shit gets so bad that they don't have any other option. My interests are in trying to draw a string between the problems that we each face and show the collective origin of those problems in the hopes that people will wake up to the reality that we are being forced to face.

Looking at the likeliness of collapse and how this beast will fall, the chance of it being brought down from inside seems to be the best of possibilities. Because of this, an insurrectionary current could be working to hasten that collapse. The most obvious way would be to attack the technological infrastructure. Civilization has an intense level of dependency on electricity and resources creating its greatest weakness.

The weakness comes from the fact that what this technological-industrial civilization is built on is limited resources, this means not only limited in future stock, but in the present. The coals that fuel plants are brought into all great centers by trains and pipelines and trucks transport oil. There is a limited amount of on-hand fuel at all the pivotal power centers. The weakness here is that the system is dependent on electricity for its power over people, but also in order to sustain itself. The power that fuels empires comes from power plants, and if those plants can't produce electricity, the empire cannot use it.

It is possible that if power were knocked out for at least two weeks in this nation, civilization would be gone for good here. Civilization lacks the ability to bring itself back up to speed without using the same level of technology that it currently uses. For example, a single power storage house could be brought back online quickly so long as there are other machines there to try and fix the entire system. But if power is wiped out in every major city and there are no other real options, what are the chances that it could be brought back on?

This has made the power grid a target for revolutionaries. It has long been recognized that general strikes completely stop a nation in its tracks because without product—and thus capital—flow, the lifeblood of the nation is cut off. This is a direct precursor to attacks on the grid, because it is about people recognizing that as the producers, state power requires their complacency. The people themselves were the mega-machine, as to some degrees they remain that way even as the bulk of work is being automated. Regardless,

all machines work with some degree of human interaction and the machines still need some workers to maintain and oversee them. The power is still in our hands in this regard.

However, current revolutionary power must transcend a purely proletarian understanding. The technological system has grown immensely and it remains the key to state power. Over the last decades, Latin American revolutionary currents have utilized attacks on the grid as one method of insurrection. Although their goal doesn't seem to be the overall elimination of the technological infrastructure, their attacks have utilized its importance. For example, in order to successfully hit city-targets, the insurgents would attack the relatively isolated generators, wiping out electricity long enough to strike the institutions, rob banks, etc. What is important here is that taking out the power debilitated the functions of the state, opening up a framework for revolutionary potential.

If there were a large enough effort, continued attacks could essentially decapitate the technological system. Electricity is the lifeblood of modern civilization, and a historical look at these actions seems to show that they could have continued their efforts and caused more permanent damage.

To look a little closer to home John Zerzan offers a look at the revolutionary surge that can be awoken, by way of the New York blackout of 1977.<sup>13</sup> He points to the looting and street parties that transcended lines of race and sex as those who had nothing else to lose broke free during a period of anonymity. The drive of people was in that moment. Being “unmediated/un-ideologized have all the pigs scared shitless.”

Imagine global blackout.

And what would happen in the meantime? People can only live off canned foods for so long before people are forced to try and deal with the situation or go down with the ship. There will be other issues as well, and people will be forced to question their dependency upon the technological system as cars and busses are inoperable. In a brief period of no electricity, it is possible to take that opportunity to awaken people to the complete insanity of the mechanistic speed of technological society. The literal powerlessness of the state opens up all kinds of revolutionary possibilities for action. The more the state focuses its efforts on reestablishing its technocratic order, the more open it remains to sabotage on all

levels.

Is this situation necessarily preferable? Compared with the other possibilities we face (i.e. nuclear war) and the inevitability of collapse, who wouldn't want to make a positive experience of it? It is important to remember that we aren't so far removed from a life without technology and we are still fortunate enough to have living memories of the "old ways." The hollow material comforts of spectacularized survival will be nothing when real experience and life are tasted. If the chances are taken to empower people, who knows what could happen? We should always remember that things get worse before they get better, but we have the potential within our beings to do something about this.

An understanding of our situation is vital for us to move forward and far too many folks are standing on the sidelines waiting for something to be handed to them. Perhaps what we're waiting for will begin when we start to make it happen, and what better time than now?

Again, this is far from any final comments on the subject, but an opening for where things could be going. Philosophical or theoretical ideas about when would be the perfect times for something to start, aren't making things happen. "Anything can happen," so what are you waiting for?

2003

#### *Endnotes*

1. It is important to note that DeFronzo is referring to a more "traditional" view of revolution as seizure of state power. While the interests here lie in abolition of all power, the same preconditions seem to remain.
2. James DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*. Boulder: Westview, 1996.
3. Arthur Evans, *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*. Boston: Fag Rag, 1978. Pg 130
4. Raoul Vaneigem, *Revolution of Everyday Life*. London: Rebel, 2001.
5. John Zerzan, *Future Primitive*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1994. Page 136.
6. In hindsight, I'm pretty sure Enron's collapse was a major factor

in these statements. – KT, 2019.

7. Alekса. personal correspondence, Jan. 2003.

8. Jacques Camatte, *This World We Must Leave*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1995.

9. Ibid, pg. 68.

10. This is essentially the bottom line of the anarcho-primitivist critique of civilization.

11. ‘The Road to Revolution’ is the article that came before this essay in *Species Traitor* no. 3 and this essay is in part a response to it. Though that article was under the name Nikto, Ted Kaczynski has claimed credit as its author, which we were not able to originally print due to prison regulations. The essay is available in *Species Traitor* no. 3 and widely spread on the internet.

12. It is important to mention that the focus of this paper has been on the U.S. and Western powers, because 1) it is where I live, 2) I feel that the U.S. is a pivotal point for global power. I feel strongly that if we can collapse the U.S., it will only spur the fall of other co-dependent empires. The same would be true of European powers. This isn’t meant to over-emphasize U.S. revolutionaries (who need a good kick in the ass) or undercut revolutions over the rest of the world, just a contextual point.

13. John Zerzan, “New York, New York” in *Elements of Refusal*. Columbia: CAL, 1999.

# The Failure of Revolution

Sorry comrade, the revolution has failed you.

This is the conclusion I've reached over the last decade. It hasn't been easy to come to terms with the realization that revolution—that innate core of anarchist thought—was the final piece of Leftism that I carried on as I came to understand that my enemy was civilization and not merely the State.

Ironically, I resisted the thought. I begged and pleaded with myself to make room for a revolution against civilization, but over the years I've come to terms with the undeniable reality: revolutions always have been and always will be strictly political in nature.

As I've worn off my once deeply held beliefs in anarcho-syndicalism from its anachronistic cynicism of human nature, it has become increasingly clear that no resistance to civilization can come through this mythic, fabled ideal. Revolution, tied as it is to a looming techno-industrial, political nightmare of a reality. My doubts have come to the surface and the sacred cow was laid before me: a rotted corpse animated by half-truths and ideals of what liberation may look like. Not only could revolution never bring about a feral future, it's become increasingly harder to imagine it bringing about any society like what its utopian forbearers had envisioned.

So before I bash revolution for my own sake, let me attack it for its own.

*Revolution and Modernization*

The problem with revolution is that any failure can so easily be justified away. It doesn't matter what the principle; democracy, anarchy, fascism, communism, socialism, etc., there's always something in the way. Never mind that humanity was never meant for organization and certainly not on any mass, political level; there's always something to blame. Lack of will, internal or external stresses and so on. No matter how many times people have tried, it's simply impossible to find one single revolution that lived up to its own propaganda. And that includes the agrarian, industrial and technological revolutions.

Communism gets stuck in socialism. Anarchism gets stuck in communism. Workerists get stuck in industrialism. Industrialists get stuck in agrarianism. Over and over again, the same sales pitch comes out in fancy, modernized clothes. And every time, it can never live up to its guise.

Time and time again, the carrot succumbs to the stick and the dead hand of progress washes the blood from the streets. When the theorized revolution fails, the ideology becomes force.

There's something about human nature that makes us not want to work. Our brains aren't hardwired for the world of delayed return. The church preaches the virtue of business. The State preaches the gospel of contribution and unity within nationalist agendas. And it's as simple as this: the people exploited in the dawn of a new era get caught in the treadmill of progress. Giving up our lives for the building of nothing is simply too much to bear. The reality is too depressing to even comprehend the implications of saying no to the hype. We fear the truth: that our lives were wasted for the triumph of emptiness.

The gears of progress simply produce used and spent fuel. Yet the architects of a forced and contrived attempt to modernize domestication can't just stop by the wayside and give into their failed ideals.

And the utopias crafted from such waste only show the tired, knee jerk refusal to lose faith. Revolutions carry the bland desire to pull our own leash, to believe our subjugation can be better. Progress encapsulated in the death of desire. We celebrate mediocrity at the altar of Modernity.

Yet the dogma remains.

No matter how many failed and half-baked revolutions rise and fall through that dogma, that ideology of entitlement to the fruits of

civilization, the bounty of a strangled earth stands strong.

All revolutions are bound to their time and place.

They speak to the totalizing nature of domestication: the failure to see beyond your own cage or, more appropriately, your own field, factory, or workshop... or just shop.

Reduced to a part of the machinery of their time, the only way up is to turn your misery into your passion: to demand your worth, but with contemporary currencies. Farmers and trade workers form guilds. In the industrializing era, workers formed unions. And in that moment of self-proclaimed worth, they found a moment of ecstasy. They got a taste of our primal need for community. And in its absence they cast their substitute and sought a way to stretch it out for eternity.

There's something to the madness of crowds. There's an acceptance and elation where you can do no wrong. You see it in riots, in festivals, in a drunken stupor, or any mutual release from stress. You can see it in the churches, stadiums or rallies: the semblance of community born in a spirit of ecstasy. The elevated senses brought about by the "incommunicable thrill of the group deliberately united in joy and exaltation," as noted by Barbara Ehrenreich in her study of communal ecstasy.<sup>1</sup>

It's that feeling that breeds vigor for a revolutionary spirit. And in that madness, the dreams make sense: the fruit of our burdens could be our own.

### *Repulsive Utopias*

The nightmare turns to addiction.

Caught in the populist tide, the idealist mistakes their desperate stand as a universal truth. The ideologues seek to control and direct the madness into their own vision. But there are always competing views and hopes. And under the universalized utopias comes the impending failure of revolution.

Like the lie of progress, the ideologue places their view into their own dialectic of history. It looks so simple and easy when they lay it out in their own well-trodden path. For the Marxist, industrialism and capitalism create breeding grounds for communism by way of socialism. For the anarchist, communism is the natural step to a worker-run, co-op stateless society. The dualistic, linear drive of

history underlies their action.

But life is never this simple.

The linear path of ideals constantly hits the cyclical nature of wildness. The soils in Russia dried against the Soviet eradication of those who had worked them. The Cultural Revolution of China gave a new speed and ferocity to civilization's ecocidal impulse. Cuba, despite outside shoves, could never be self-sufficient. Peru, Nicaragua, Chile, Guatemala; none could convince their Indigenous occupants of the nationalistic urgency to feed the urbanites.

In turn, the ideologues sought utopia by force.

And the anarchists remained complacent for far too long in almost every case. Among the communist and socialist revolutions you can easily find the anarchists trying to shape or guide the revolutionary uprisings. They carried the buried dream that ultimately their dialectic would rise at the right moment. In those moments of ecstasy they stood alongside the revolution for the sake of revolution.

And each time they failed.

During Russia's November Revolution of 1917, Emma Goldman took to the defense of Lenin and Trotsky "who hold the world in awe by their personality, their prophetic vision, and their intense revolutionary spirit."<sup>2</sup> Taken by the ambiguous mix of revolutionary dogma—some of which played greatly with the insurrectionist ideas of the anarchists and nihilists—Goldman and a great number of anarchists at the time overlooked that the Bolsheviks took the reins because they were more understanding of the force a successful revolution must take. Thrusting itself against the grain of human intuition, they were at least more honest about taking arms and securing their ideological stronghold.

Even among their own ranks, by 1920, Lenin had taken the revolutionary dogma to its fully open conclusion stating: "If we are not ready to shoot a saboteur and White Guardist, what sort of revolution is that?"<sup>3</sup>

In shock and awe, the anarchists were exiled and persecuted by the Soviets. Voline barely escaped the firing squads of the Bolsheviks while believing their comradery in the struggle against capitalism unified them. Realizing the obvious within the grasp of a revolutionary cleansing, Voline recounted speaking with Trotsky before the guns were turned:

*“It is inevitable that you and we should come into conflict. You will begin to persecute us just as soon as your power has been consolidated. And you will end by having us shot down like partridges...”*

*“—Come, come, comrade,” Trotsky replied. “You people are pig-headed and incorrigible fanatics. Look, as things now stand, what is the difference between us? A little question of methodology, quite secondary. You, like us, are revolutionaries. Like you, we are anarchists, in the final analysis. The only thing is that you want to introduce your anarchism straight away, without transition or preparation. Whereas we Marxists believe that one cannot “leap” into the libertarian realm in a single bound. We anticipate a transitional stage during which the ground can be cleared and smoothed for the anarchist society with the aid of an anti-bourgeois political power. In short, it is only a difference of “degree”, nothing more. Essentially, we are very close to one another. Brother in arms. Think of it: we will have a common foe to fight. Will it even occur to us to fight one another? And anyway, I have no doubt but that you will quickly be persuaded of the necessity for a provisional socialist proletarian dictatorship. So I really cannot see any reason for warfare between you and us. We will assuredly march hand in hand. And then, even if we do not see eye to eye, you are overstating things a bit to suggest that we socialists will use brute force against anarchists! Come, come, what do you take us for? Anyways, we are socialists, comrade Voline! So we are not your enemies...”*

*In December 1919, gravely wounded, I was arrested by the Bolshevik military authorities in the Makhnovist region. Deeming me a militant “of some standing,” the authorities notified Trotsky of my arrest by means of a special telegram asking his view of how I should be handled. His answer arrived snappily and tersely and plainly—also by telegram: “Shoot out of hand. - Trotsky.” I was not shot, thanks solely to a set of particularly felicitous and quite fortuitous circumstances.<sup>4</sup>*

You have the same pattern repeating throughout history. The anarchist support and factions of the Spanish Civil War mirror the situation in Russia horribly. Even after ranting on the situation in

Russia, Goldman continued to be surprised by the “communist sabotage of the revolution”<sup>5</sup> to no avail. In Cuba, the anarchists still live on the run. And from the sidelines they cried out against the injustice and the betrayal of revolution: treason to the proletariat.

The problems are systemic. Not just for communist, capitalist or fascistic systems, but any mass level of synthetic social organization. Whether anarchists oppose the State or not, they merely pay lip service to the necessary bureaucracy and needs of a state-level society. Compared to the rest, anarchists differ merely in their lack of imagination in understanding this point.

But they could continue to peddle this line for so long solely because they never got this far. What Yves Fremian overzealously called the “Orgasms of History” were merely premature wet dreams.<sup>6</sup> The outcome of their dialectic was simply the delusion of linguistics. The red anarchists spoke of the need for increased production the same as the socialists: a throwback to the euphoric celebrations of councils drunk as they were on the outcomes of Progress.

In Alexander Berkman’s criticisms of the Russian Revolution, he claimed his initial excitement was based on the premise that the revolution was “the only one which actually abolished the capitalist system on a country-wide scale, and fundamentally altered all social relationships existing till then.”<sup>7</sup> That historically laughable after-the-fact realization shows that his own premises about the nature of the proletariat, their struggles and aims were no closer to reality than Lenin or Trotsky’s understandings. Outside of being exiled from Russia, it’s impossible to think Berkman would have done much differently had the roles been exchanged.

Like the proletarian towing propagandists of the time, Berkman played the same lines:

*It should be clearly understood that the social revolution necessitates more intensive production than under capitalism in order to supply the needs of the larger masses who till then had lived in penury. This greater production can be achieved only by the workers having previously prepared themselves for the new situation. Familiarity with the process of industry, knowledge of the sources of supply, and determination to succeed will accomplish the task. ... Revolution always wakens a high degree of responsibility.<sup>8</sup>*

Berkman's presumptions have failed field test after field test. Whether it's the inability of South American socialists to foster support among the peasants or even the infamous Russian example set in 1921 during the Kronstadt Revolt—when protest among the unwilling and unenthused workers went on strike only to have the arms of the Revolution turned on them. Goldman didn't seem to sense the irony in attributing the strikes to a winter that was an “exceptionally hard one, and the people of the capital suffered intensely from cold, hunger, and exhaustion. They asked an increase of their food rations, some fuel and clothing.”<sup>9</sup>

Among the many failures of revolution, awakening “a high degree of responsibility” seems to rank fairly high. Revolution oriented and driven anarchists will beg and plead that this is due to the course of the revolution, not the nature of the society, but where is an example to the contrary? Would one be possible? Even more important, would it be worth waiting on? Had the anarchists of past or present attributed some foresight and even hindsight in recognizing why revolutions fail on anarchist goals alone, I'd be willing to entertain the notion. But when the ecstatic rage of the masses collects, it's like hitting a reset button on the propaganda machine and the inevitable (and righteous) feelings of anger are left in a bloody aftermath when the guns get turned around.

Likewise Errico Malatesta, in his yearnings for revolution called for land workers to “no longer recognize the landowners' property rights, but continue and intensify production on their own account” while industrial workers “should take possession of the factories and continue and intensify production for their own benefit and that of the whole community.”<sup>10</sup> And again, there's a reason you don't see this happening.

In fairness, the Kronstadt strikers weren't getting the benefits of increased production all around, but the equally stressed and reluctant “land workers” met an equal fate—albeit with a less organized curtain call. Malatesta was only a step ahead of his contemporaries in addressing the farmers dead on. They most likely shared the delusions of progress their former Russian allies held: “The Bolsheviks' need to live off the land probably surprised themselves more than it surprised the peasants.”<sup>11</sup>

Outside of power, outside of politics, their utopias gleamed in delusion. Given the chance, would they not take the path of the

socialists? Would the utilitarian “will of the people” be cast any differently?

We have yet to see, but the red anarchists will never get their chance to be proven wrong.

In their euphoric delusion, the anarchists misunderstood the rage and discontent, just as the socialists and fascists had. Their vision failed to understand the problem wasn’t the spread of wealth, but the production of it: an unquestioned need to work. The proletarian will that the socialists poured their faith into rang hollow as the eve of the revolution was followed by business as usual. The counter-intuitiveness of the machine still bred lethargy. The orchestration of the machine called back the capitalists who drew the blueprints once more.

*Transition* became justification.

It comes back to the madness, the euphoria, the group therapy of councils, unions, and a shared plight or identity. In those moments, the elation gave a face and a name. It gave a name to the stick that dangled the golden carrot. And in these moments, the mass could almost smell it.

But the scent fades. The stench of manure, the heat of smelting iron, the cough of the miner, the torn body of the logger, the hunger of the baker, the emptying seas, the scarred face of the earth; all these feelings won out. The hollow promises of a better tomorrow taste too much like the stale after taste of yesterday.

And this is where revolutions die.

The death march of progress, the peak of civilized existence is always out of reach. The rage of the dispossessed cannot be fooled forever. In the end, a part of our soul always knows the only thing singing in the coalmine is the canary.

### *The Anti-Nature of the State*

I’d be dishonest to claim that my lack of enthusiasm for revolutionary anarchists and revolutions past was solely due to a crude underestimation of the will of the people. There is no exception to the genocide and ecocide inducing prerogatives of progress among the revolutionaries.

If there’s one place that my disdain for revolutionary blindness comes about the most, it’s in the highly held successes when and where they briefly occurred. It never ceases to amaze me when

anarchists cite the few minute examples of forced and temporary “autonomous zones” as a glimpse of anarchy in action. For all the revolutions, for all the occupied and reclaimed spaces, you have a shattered, intentional attempt to pull the pieces together and rarely have anything to show for it.

Coming back to Fremion’s frightening wet dream of history, he salivates over the list of modernization and technological prowess put into place during the Spanish Revolution. Be it the dam built to bring water to “a million almond trees” which he further called an “out-and-out economic miracle” due to the speed of its construction. Or be it the new poultry feed, the “900 new shoe styles,” or that the workers had, in his words, “no hesitation in diverting streams, clearing the land, erecting mills, setting up farms, and refectories” while in shops they “even assumed responsibility for the debts incurred by the previous capitalist owners.”<sup>12</sup> I fail to see where the underlying lies and destruction of progress are being swayed.

You’ll have to pardon my lack of enthusiasm for what, in hindsight of the failures of revolution, seems like pure revisionist history. In the eyes of the civilizers, Fremion’s unbeknownst Blake-ian nightmare is typically part and parcel of the fast tracked modernizing any revolution undertakes. The Russian Revolution succeeded in massive overhauls on a nearly destroyed ecosystem, using fertilizers and technologically driven farming methods to wrench perhaps another century from complete ecological collapse in the region. The same can be said for the rapid building of dams in China after the revolution.

When revolutionaries imbued their desires with that of the State and its needs, they become the flag bearers for the destruction of the Earth.

States or state-level societies are inherently unsustainable and the greater the reliance upon technology and need to develop it, the more rampant the ecological devastation. We are innately nomadic beings. What has allowed us to live for so long, so far beyond our means and need for community and wildness is ironically our adaptability. What once kept us from being over dependent upon any certain food source or eco-niche has kept our bodies fighting against the carcinogen cocktail that is the air and water we breathe, drink, and abuse.

Not one thing has happened over the past ten thousand years or so since societies settled, or were conquered, that has changed

our essential being: our minds, bodies, and senses remain the same. The underlying drive of progress, once we stop looking towards our liberated future of techno-addiction, is to separate those needs and reassemble them around the socially constructed demands of a society tinkering on the edge of destruction. Whether we embody the spirit of domestication and leap into the brink of peak everything as an anarchist collective or a disembodied, cutthroat opportunist doesn't change anything about the grounded needs of all peoples and societies.

No matter how hard anyone fights against the State, or for it for that matter, we still need to eat, drink and breathe. The revolutionary spirit, no matter how liberated its propagandists may believe it to be, can't feed itself. Even beyond meeting our needs for community and wildness, we simply can't survive on ideology and philosophy and social contracts. Revolutions fail because they perpetuate a society or social level that cannot, has not, and never will be capable of sustaining itself for any prolonged period of time.

And that's certainly something I have no interest in fighting for or siding with.

In fixating on the State or a State as an enemy, the mantra of revolution is to unite against one enemy and every interested party is hoping it's their dialectic or their unspoken desire that erupts. As we've already seen here and anywhere in the world where a revolutionary dogma creeps out, it demands uncomfortable partnerships that rarely turn out in any positive light.

And few are more likely to play on that ambiguity than insurrectionalists.

### *The Insurrectionist Delusion*

Of all types of anarchism, no one dances with the euphoric more than the insurrectionist.

I should specify that not all insurrectionary anarchists are insurrectionalists. The distinction that I make is when insurrection is the sole end goal, the idea being that sheer upheaval brings about positive change. Insurrectionary anarchists may append their hope for insurrection with a larger, grounded critique. What I'm referring to specifically here are the nihilistic anarchists who trump critique with the much-taunted hope for transformation through destruction without aim. Born of a nihilistic urge and revolutionary

fervor, the insurrectionalist demands elation.

In a selfish act of indulgence, the insurrectionalist anarchist basks in the glory of the individual.

They feel the poetry of rioting like a dance. The smashing of anything tangibly relating to the “old order” is like a chorus. Bakunin typified the rage when he stated that the “urge to destroy is also a creative urge.” The unattainable sense of urgency and damning of ideologues cries from that same rage that the revolutionaries tried to tap into. Every act of self-expression and anger touches closer to the sacred self. The ego bows to its reflection and becomes addicted to euphoria until it can no longer imagine a purer vision of liberation.

But, as we have seen, that euphoria can’t last forever.

The disembodied egoist has isolated themselves, mistaken joy for purity, and only bred the revolutionary delusion. In an embrace of the unknown, they grasp the trajectory of progress, reaching for an unknown future and demanding its boundless potential.

And the unknown extends to all aspects of life.

Max Stirner, founding egoist anarchist who remains the underlying source for insurrectionalist dogma, famously declared “all things are nothing to me”<sup>13</sup> in a statement of defiance to a society where he sees inter-reliance as weakness. In his vision, only once individuals recognized their uniqueness in and of their own right could they connect on any anarchistic level. Seeing the tattered community of the State, he made the common mistake of blaming human nature rather than merely the social circumstances of civilization. And mirroring the mistakes of domestication the individual is the only basis for understanding and relating to the world. The interconnected community of wildness disregarded and set aside removed from the Earth, from community, Stirner’s “Union of Egos” can only remain a dream. And the nihilistic egoist can only search for their own liberation in nothingness, some pure isolation from context.

Like any philosophical quest, it can never be complete.

Had the power of Stirner’s precious self extended beyond his body, he might have recognized the irony in having died of a bug bite.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the poetic egoists and nihilists to follow didn’t take note either. The rhetoric of the insurrectionists stems from this tainted notion of the self as defined by civilization and, even worse, by modernity. The source of change they seek in a moment

of uprising within the concrete and steel cages of the modernized environment is itself a realization of all our damaged psyches are capable of imagining.

I believe it is within our own nature that we can find and recognize what is wrong with our lives, but for completely different reasons than the insurrectionalists. While they believe there is no human nature and that the future is unwritten, I see the opposite and in a liberatory sense. It is our connections that give us context, our community, our place within wildness. Civilization is perpetuated by the questions over the meaning of life, not wild communities. True to form, the nihilist and the egoist reject the question by refuting the possibility of knowing. It is taking the longest path to the simplest conclusion: that we know by feeling and experiencing what life is, not by externalizing.

The path of the insurrectionalist—if taken by their propaganda rather than their unspoken hopes—can find no end and no community. Life becomes a constant quest, born of strife and revolt against a truly imposing situation initially, but it lives out through trial-and-error process, sorting the mess of domestication without grounding. The dogma produced, inspiring though it may be, bites hard on social relationships such as the family and community without recognizing that the need for community is what spurs civilizers of all levels to tear apart and reassemble social networks as if the sum of all parts was equal to the whole. The relationships that we have as civilized beings are no doubt twisted versions of our wild cousins, but the complete rejection and search for a new starting point ignores who we are and what we need. That pushes the real issue further: why the civilizing process works, for the most part, in making innately wild humans tame consumers and civilians.

The insurrectionalist Feral Faun echoes Stirner:

*All social relationships have their basis in the incompleteness produced by the repression of our passions and desires. Their basis is our need for each other. We are using each other.<sup>15</sup>*

He then continues to default on the passions and desires of individuals as the point of eruption and potential insurrection. And this sentiment is echoed through all insurrectionalist propaganda through time.

The dogma becomes as infantile as the disorders that

perpetuate civilization. A recent example is an insurrectionalist magazine that boldly declared on its cover “For Nothing, Against Everything.”<sup>16</sup> The standard lines are poetic ramblings that have been used effectively by any lofty ideologue from Trotsky to Hitler with anarchists sharing the vagueness in between.

What’s even worse than taking the insurrectionalists at their word is believing that they’re not towing an ideological line in their calls for hopes and desires. In all past revolutions you have insurrectionary leaflets taking a central role in recruitment and continued perseverance, but when the smoke clears the hope of the revolution washes over the aspirations of the loudest harshly. In their lack of vision, the dogma falls short.

That is why the nihilist inspired Situationists reeked of beautiful-stated insurrectionary dogma amidst a poetic critique of modernity where Guy Debord could state that the success of production and its abundance “is experienced by its producers only as an *abundance of possession*”<sup>17</sup> and Raoul Vaneigem could proclaim that we “have a world of pleasures to win, and nothing to lose but boredom,”<sup>18</sup> while ultimately defaulting to the power of the Workers’ Councils.

We are beings of context. We have needs. Tainted by the whims of the domesticators, we are lost, but our damage is neither complete nor irreversible.

Domestication is the process of taming wildness: a process, but not an act. It works so long as the environment is controlled, maintained as a reflection of the civilizers’ linear drive. The rage that revolutionaries target, that insurrectionists gleam, that fascists, priests and politicians damn, that is our stubborn refusal to die inside. Drowned, refused, and contorted, our rage seeps in contempt for our condition.

In a sense, the insurrectionalist knows this. They put their blind faith into it. They call for a subjection to desire unbound by circumstance, even when those impulses stem from a civilized will to power and lust. It becomes another misguided reaction to a disempowered life. As elating as the moments of insurrection may be, as much as they may open the door, they never lead very far in and of themselves.

We are beings of context. We have needs. The nihilistic denial of this is the delusion of the insurrectionalist: the dishonest

acknowledgement that something makes us human. That some universal condition, some communal urge, lurks within. Without embracing the full revolutionary utopia, the insurrectionalist merely hopes the rioter or the insurrectionary impulse leads towards their same realization. They see the Union of Egos freed from all restraints, seen and unseen.

But this poetry of self-indulgence is merely another guise for the populist revolution. It remains just another implicit celebration of the ghost of progress into the oblivious pursuit of Modernity.

And in that linguistic dance, the insurrectionary poet can never be wrong. Instead they live out a purist pursuit and a fear of failure hidden beneath the half-frightened hopes for revolution.

In the revolutions, the insurrectionists hide on all sides under a banner of anarchistic urges to destroy and the elated rage of the present: a mix of fear and hope and a refusal to accept responsibility for action. Soaking in the righteous, undefined glory: progress stands triumphant.

### *The Trouble with Politics*

The looming question when it comes to revolutions and insurrections is why they fail. The revolutionary sees a failure of technique, any number of tactical issues that weren't dealt with properly or an inability of the people being "liberated" to do what they must for the success of the revolution. The insurrectionalist can simply default on their poetic discourse and claim the complete disruption of everything was not achieved. Both can fall back on the State, but by their very nature neither of them can question the power that a State or state-level society makes possible.

As beings infused with the sensibility and rootedness of hunter-gatherers, we were never meant to think on the size and scale of any civilization, much less one with a technological-industrial system at its disposal.

The failure of revolutionary dogma and action is in the inability to see beyond power.

Political, economic and social power, created by sedentary and surplus-dependent societies underlie civilization. Technological innovations are a necessary response to the adapting needs of exponentially growing populations with their increased dependence

upon centralized, stagnant circumstance. That is what creates the stratified, hierarchical, bureaucratic institutions that we all know so intimately in our society, just as our ancestors knew or had to face down in their own lives.

All systems, whether they are theocracies, democracies, communist, fascist, capitalist, feudal, or what have you, must address the most basic question of the continuation of power. In our modernized reality, that comes in the form of electricity and then sheer force, but our belief in the necessity of stored resources is the focus of the domestication process. It always has been and always will be.

The strength of any system is the totalizing conviction with which that message can be conveyed. Politics are intangible. The effects of politics never are. Piles of bodies, prisons, televisions, buildings, concrete, steel, and plastic are all the physical creations of power and its assertion, but you can't touch a social network. As tempting as it might be, you can't assassinate an ideology. Yet this is the singular battlefield on which revolutionaries and insurrectionaries must play. If you wish to alter society, if you want to grab it by its reigns and innately change it, you must succumb to its delusion of power and the methods by which it is maintained.

So long as the State is the enemy, revolutions fail because they must play into the ideology of power. No matter what they hope to achieve or how they hope to spread it, they must wrangle the intangible and, in the case of anarchists and communists, collectivize it on some level while maintaining its unwavering path.

That is why the classical anarchists talked about the need to increase production. It's hardly a major talking point because it's a source of contempt and deception. But even the most convinced revolutionary knows that people need to eat. The more modernized the society, the less leeway for downtime in the food distribution networks.

Their premise must remain unquestioned: that in a more ideal society, the daily sacrifice of labor to the megamachine won't feed an unapproachable system. That reflects a lack of understanding about why it is that humans don't want to work. By work, I'm referring specifically to production of a surplus by a fragmented system, a contribution to an unseen whole rather than the daily, immediate efforts of our grounded ancestors and cousins living closer to or within the cycles of our earth. There is nowhere in the relatively

brief history of civilization where you see that sacrifice being taken easily and the reason is simple: it's not in our nature to work towards building some great distant future. We are beings of the present, we are wild animals: the only way we have been convinced otherwise is through a constant barrage of mental and physical reconstructions of our needs.

The issue of power is and always will be tied to the issue of production. No revolution will change that. No technology will change that. As much as visionaries have tried to open our eyes to unseen possibilities, we need to eat, sleep, drink, and breathe. Revolutionaries come to power seeking to give a new face to that sacrifice at the altar of progress and they soon find that they keep it by forcing production.

That grasp of power is what unites revolutionaries and the systems they oppose. Politics and revolution are tied, and so long as insurrectionalists play in the realm of established social relationships they are caught in the same track.

And despite the lofty, poetic dreams of liberation, the outcome is always the same.

### *When the Grid is the Enemy*

This estimation of the failures of revolution and insurrection is far from a surrendering to the power of domestication and the politics it perpetuates. Quite the contrary, I'm interested in understanding what it takes to bring about the end of the civilized era. And the question comes back to power.

The revolutionaries focus on power in a strategic sense. Rather than questioning why politics continue to rule our lives, they seek to possess and redirect them. The problem is the existence of politics and the ability of a political system to self perpetuate.

That lies in the heart of production.

The roots of civilization spread back to the settling of nomadic hunter-gatherers around a surplus of storable foods; be it grains, tubers, or fish. Here you are more prone to see the areas of social and spiritual stratification surrounding the distribution of a steady stockpile of foods. The need to distribute the newly accrued resource becomes necessary as the society becomes increasingly dependent upon it. Breaking directly and starkly with the adaptivity that

accompanies nomadic life. But this is a slow pattern and far from inevitable. Yet where it emerges you have a larger, stratified society, capable and in need of state-level organization.

The dawn of civilization is built around permanent settlements with political and religious centers and food producing peripheries: cities. As that society grows through conquest and growth, the necessities of life include sources of fuel for the social centers and those living in and around them. Natural and created resources become a part of the power infrastructure.

In the age of peak oil, we should all be innately aware of the importance limited resources play in the life of a society pushing the boundaries of the ecosystem in which it is based. As oil wars rage, as water scarcity feeds civil war, as critics of food producers are brandished terrorists, it is horribly apparent how weak the network that creates and supports political power is in relation to its armed face: the military, police, and concrete infrastructure.

Engaged in the same sphere, the revolutionary is left to face that opponent on their terrain. They must plan to fight the State where all political systems must excel the most: suppression through force. The ideal of revolution is to avoid this when possible, but there has rarely been a case where that outcome is even expected. Instead you have a deliberate conflict of forces and bloodshed.

When you look beyond civilization, the possibilities begin to open up. On the one hand, you see the weaknesses instilled in a system sustaining the mirage of power and, on the other hand, you have the consequences of that same civilization pushing against the boundaries of ecological capacity. It always has and always will be a losing battle and at the same time opens up further cracks in the armor of Leviathan.

Innate in understanding civilization as the target rather than its political face is the reality of a self-consuming, narcissistic cannibal. In accepting our wild human nature and a deepening relationship with remaining and struggling ecosystems, the opportunities make themselves available in ways that the revolutionaries and insurrectionists will neither have nor see.

Where revolutions fail is where the potential for the complete collapse of the technologically dependent, resource-starved modernity flourish. When we stop identifying with the faulty premise of sacrifice to progress, we can open ourselves to learn from the mistakes of our well-intentioned anarchist forbearers.

### *Primal War*

The flipside of asking why revolutions fail is asking why Indigenous resistance movements have withstood so much over time. Faced with brutal colonizing forces, whether it is nomadic hunter-gatherers fighting expanding agrarian neighbors or imperial armies, there is a long standing tradition of unrelenting existence. Typically they had greater results than most revolutions.

The reason is the one thing that revolutionaries and insurrectionaries consistently overlook: our innate need for community, for wildness and the primal anarchy that runs through our spirit and connects us. It's something you can't fault revolutionaries for, this oversight is the linchpin of domestication: the reorganization of our spiritual connectivity.

Revolutions fail because revolutionaries and insurrectionaries must tow the line of progress, the dream that the sacrifice of individuals has some greater meaning in the realm of human history and destiny. That is a path that has led to ecological instability and rampant decimation of wildness. The outcomes of revolution have only ever effected the speed and scale of that destruction. The revolutionary is selling ideology while the insurrectionalist is selling a blind hope of an improbable and seemingly unpredictable future.

Revolutions fail because when the blood inevitably begins to flow and the face of revolution so closely begins to resemble or take the place of the gallows of the State. In that process leaving the revolutionary to rightfully question the sacrifice. And it's hard to imagine why this wouldn't be the case. At the end of the day ideas are simply ideas. The hopes and dreams envisioned by the propagandists ring hollow alongside every other lie of Progress.

The connections that we so desperately need remain denied and buried in a sea of convoluted sales pitches.

And it is here that revolutions die.

Politics are intangible. Wildness is not. Community is not. These are things that we feel, live, experience and connect to personally. There are no sales pitches or revolutionary cries that can take the place of our primal anarchy, the spirit of wildness embedded in our genes.

Hunter-gatherer and horticultural societies have continued their resistance because this is something they know, something they are tied to. Community is not a political ideal. The food they have foraged and harvested is not an ideology written about in newspapers. The primal anarchy of their society is lived out rather than spoken. They fight because of what they feel rather than what they think they know.

But there is nothing unique about any of these societies—neither past nor present—that is alien to us. Despite the lies of the civilizers, domestication has not changed who we are. It has wrought destruction upon our earth, but it is a constant and fragile process. Wildness continues to flourish in spite of the domesticating hand of the State. It creeps up through concrete, grows through foundations, overcomes structures, and it resists our sedentary lifestyles whether we like it or not.

And it is freeing.

Unlike the promises and hopes of revolution, the vague possibilities offered by insurrectionists, wildness is tangible and available. It is something we can connect with here and now. The refusal of domestication, the giving over to wildness, the unlearning of civilized interpretation through a simple humility in the face of the simplicity of ecological sanity—what I call the primal war—counters the failures of revolution.

In giving up on the Left, in ridding the shackles of politics, the world awaits. And within that recognition, through our own attempts to rewild and reform community lie the key to understanding that the revolutions fail because politics have failed us; domestication and civilization have failed us.

In recognizing the lies of progress, the twilight of power makes itself apparent. We merely need to join with the Earth in overcoming this plague. And if we look close enough, we will see that we merely need to follow its lead.

2010

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# The Message and the Messenger: FC, Ted Kaczynski, and Resisting the Technological System

*Note: When this essay was originally published in 2005, Ted was still claiming that he was not “FC,” so I left the door open on that possibility solely because he made it at the time, likely for the hope of some legal recourse.*

*I was also more sympathetic to Ted and FC than I have been since. If anything, the things I identified in my discussions with Ted found a younger and less cognizant audience that was willing to listen and take him at his word, not even double checking his often cherry-picked and misquoted citations. Perhaps those willing to engage the odd stardom that Ted continues to have would do well to read this.*

It's been a decade since “FC” sent what would be the last bomb of a seventeen-year bombing campaign.

These bombs, aimed at airlines, technocrats and computer engineers, were all part of a larger message: the technological system is killing the earth and we will no longer allow this. That message was driven home when two national American papers were forced into printing *Industrial Society and Its Future*.

This is what would be called the Unabomber Manifesto.

A year later, in 1996, Harvard graduate and mathematician turned hermit Theodore Kaczynski was turned in by his brother

as a suspect in the Unabom case. He was later convicted and given two life sentences. In every aspect of his life, the media demonized Ted. He became pictured as a deranged and meticulous serial killer. His life was torn apart and would be recreated by his brother and mother to fit the media profile.

Every step was taken to shoot the messenger.

But the message would inevitably slip through the cracks. It found solace among anti-civilization anarchists, neo-Luddites, ecologists, and those chewed up and left behind by the dehumanizing technological system. For some it was a confirmation that something was very wrong about our way of living. Even more so, it was a message that something drastic needed to happen to change that.

It was a message that something drastic *could* happen.

For those within the technological system, that is a frightening message. That is why it is buried far beneath an obsession with the messenger. Buried to a place where most are neither interested nor willing to dig. Buried to a place where many would-be sympathizers have little interest in digging.

The technocrats and their media sympathizers know this. They know that the public loves a good spectacle. They love a face, even if it's a face that they love to hate. In the case of FC, that face is Ted Kaczynski. The mad mathematician turned hermit-bomber. They say he molested his bombs. They say that he bombed because of his mental instabilities and his failure to connect with other people. They say anything that will sell their story. And that is the story that sells. But it is not just *their* story: the corporate media has and needs no monopoly. Many would-be sympathizers are just as eager to push FC aside.

Of course that's understandable, it's easier to play along and stay on the safe side. FC was, in fact, a terrorist group. Bombing is a violent act. For those eager to sell their own ideology and prove their moral purity, these are tough issues. They think that only lunatics kill, that violence is never justified while they ignore the violence that is inseparable from everyday life within the technological system, within civilization. They stick to the drama surrounding Ted, who still has never willingly claimed to be FC. As they see it, FC remains the product of a warped mind and we can move along.

And the reverse happens as well: Ted becomes romanticized. He becomes an icon of resistance to the technological system. A Ned Ludd for the twentieth century. Like any other icon, martyr or

media star, the messenger becomes the message. They can do no wrong.

I know this from experience.

I was drawn to Ted for pretty apparent reasons: both of us wish to destroy the technological system and are open to any method for achieving that goal. I know I was never searching for a martyr, but even as a friend, Ted remained something of a media star. When I began writing Ted in early 2001, it was with a combination of eagerness and curiosity about whom this person was and what they were trying to say. Our correspondence grew heavily, ending rather abruptly in 2004.

Through that period, my view of Ted changed greatly, but the ordeal took with it my whole understanding of what it means to be critical and the limits of solidarity. I've come to a greater understanding of the significance of the Unabomber campaign, the subsequent trial, Ted Kaczynski, and resisting civilization. The entire Unabomber ordeal is extremely important. Far too important to not give it a more critical and complex approach than the simple characterized look at the Unabomber as Ted Kaczynski: demon or saint.

The message and the messenger need to be understood in their own right and the link between the two needs to be contextualized. Whether we agree or not with the tactics, we have to recognize that FC raised the bar for the momentum against the technological system.

This is what I'm interested in looking at. I'm not interested in the ridiculous debate over violence and non-violence. To me it is just another philosophical abstraction to keep us mediated from action and bound to rigid moralistic thinking: another barrier to action. This is a critical evaluation for those who are open to all the tools in the toolbox, to beat a cliché senseless.

### *The Significance of FC*

To me, the most important issue raised by FC is a tactical question: how effective is terrorism as a tactic?

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks, even the word terrorism can be terrorizing. Due to a worsened political climate, it has become the norm to step as far away from the term and what it stands for. To a degree, this is understandable. But let's not blur

facts. The Unabomber campaign was terrorism: certain individuals were targeted because of their positions. They weren't necessarily targeted because their deaths would have ended the technological system, but because they were replaceable technocrats.

I want to emphasize this point. In terms of directly ending or threatening the technological system, FC would be a complete failure. 3 deaths and 29 injuries will not break the system, no matter whom those targets are. The individuals were chosen carefully (though not always the victims), but what they represented to the system was a huge part of the message: *engineers of the technological system will be held personally accountable for their contributions.*

FC was, of course, not doing anything new or original. Campaigns of political assassinations, another form of terrorism, do the same thing. A technocrat is no different from a politician: though symbolic, they are easily replaceable. *It is the position, not the individual, which is targeted.* Terrorism of this sort is as old as dissent.

And it can be very effective. History shows us as much. It is a tactic of guerrillas and of empires. Revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries alike have always used it. What usually determines the effect is the scale. During revolutionary periods throughout Latin America, it would be a norm to see hundreds or even thousands of bureaucrats assassinated between regimes. The US government uses it as much throughout the world as it has on radical groups like the American Indian Movement and the Black Panthers.

But it doesn't always have to be about murder.

It is a tactical approach. One example that is a little closer to home is the animal liberation campaign Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC). Over the past few years, SHAC has grown to an international campaign with one goal: shut down Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), one of the largest vivisectors in the world. The idea is simple: you start with the largest operation and shut them down, shaking the whole field up in the process and then picking off the others. In concrete terms, this means raiding and torching HLS labs, protesting and otherwise disrupting financial backers, and holding the individual vivisectors and corporate bureaucrats accountable by holding protests outside their homes.

A large portion of the animal liberation contingency has

distanced themselves from those involved with SHAC. They are constrained by moralistic blinders and a fear of losing their mass appeal. In doing so, they overlook that this tactic *is* effective. HLS is being cut off and is well on the way to shutting down. Those involved are learning a lesson about accountability. And they are learning this without direct violence.

I'm not saying that the SHAC campaign is perfect or such tactics will end vivisection. Neither is true, but this is the same tactic at work on another level. A level that *Industrial Society and its Future* reminds us will not end animal exploitation any more than the FC campaign would have ended the technological system. HLS can be shut down, but vivisection will not be stopped. This kind of tactic is only applicable on a small enough scale or with a massive momentum. Unfortunately, the anti-civilization and anti-technological momentums lack the latter.

But what FC lacked in quantity was compensated for in quality. Revolutionary violence is largely a thing of the past in the US. While there is an excess of surveillance and security technology, there's not a whole lot of violence directed at technocrats and politicians to really justify it. Their security is preemptive and it gives the impression of being untouchable. In the US climate, this comfort level becomes pathological: the ultra-specialized bureaucracy becomes anonymous. Had the reason for the targets been given more attention, the FC campaign could have been far more effective in shaking things up. The engineers of the technological system could have been exposed as the Eichmann's of the late twentieth century. FC could have offered a mail order Nuremberg.

Because of the media, this didn't happen. Accountability may have found its way into the larger psychological landscape, but coming right at the beginning of a massive growth in technocratic positions, the message was saturated.

And it's doubtful that this could have happened. The technological system is strong enough to have endured the loss of 3 technocrats and could take the loss of many more. While I have no real sympathy for technocrats and politicians, I have serious doubts about how effective this approach really is or could be. Fortunately, I think the weaknesses of the technological system are far easier to attack. And those targets are not human, which we'll return to.

But no matter what we think about these kinds of attacks, we have to realize that this has happened. FC has taken lives and the

idea is out there.

Like it or not, the bar is raised.

The primary contribution of FC remains the essay *Industrial Society and its Future*. I think the essay really speaks for itself, so I won't give it as much attention here. But I do want to emphasize a few points.

From my reading, the manifesto really drives home two major points: the technological system must be destroyed and that any anti-technological movement must sharply break from the Left. Tactically, I agree completely with the first and I agree as much with the second point, but what that means for me differs greatly from what Ted has in mind and likely what FC had intended. Perhaps this is the area where Ted has become inseparable from FC because of his steadfast grasp on the idea of a movement dedicated solely to the destruction of the technological system.

And this is the area where I split from Ted the most. That is because of two primary differences: 1) I don't see a revolution against technology or civilization as being any more likely than preferable and 2) that stems from a distrust of mass movements and the kind of organizations that revolutions require. A revolution, especially the kind that Ted and FC envision, needs a mass ideology and program. A revolution against the technological system will not look like a couple hundred FC's mailing bombs, but like any other revolution. That is a certain structure and pattern that has always failed.

Perhaps it is because I'm interested in destroying civilization in a totalistic sense rather than just the concrete technological infrastructure that I have such sharp differences with Ted and FC. It is in terms of tactics and targets that we are largely on the same level, but where I'm interested in going, revolution cannot go.

This all comes back to what Ted has written since his arrest. I see what Ted has written as extremely important, but at the same time, somewhat distinguishable from what FC put on the table. Perhaps this is where words and action split. But I see those actions made by FC alone as something worthy in their own right. Though they are within the greater context of Ted Kaczynski and the media, I hope that guilt by association will never result in such a significant campaign being tossed entirely aside.

We have FC to thank for not only reminding us that reform is

worthless, but also that the system is vulnerable. FC reminds us that behind the machine are human names and faces. FC reminds them that they are not untouchable.

Most importantly, FC reminds us that we can do something about the destruction of life.

### *The Significance of Ted Kaczynski*

Over the years that I wrote Ted, I got a much clearer idea of who Ted is and what he wants. I don't think that anyone can question his absolute conviction and devotion to the cause of destroying the technological system. He has certainly gained my respect, but he has not earned my trust.

Ted is a revolutionary. If he indeed is FC, then that campaign, like his post-arrest writings, is a contribution to that movement. A movement that Ted seems to see himself as at least partial engineer: he's somewhat of a self-appointed vanguard. Like any vanguard, they must recruit followers for their ultimate cause. Though not necessarily lying, they aren't afraid to bend the truth to suit their needs, use things like flattery and deceit to brew their following and create like-minded engineers. I was always conscious of this and could see it in action. Ted no doubt has his agenda and will do what it takes to push it. This much is expected of a revolutionary. He has said the same about me. But a central part of our break was his inability to sell me on his agenda.

I do want to be fair to Ted. I'm not interested in trashing him and certainly not in discounting what he has done. I raise these issues because I think Ted has put something significant on the table, even if he is not FC, and that it deserves respectful attention, but must be approached critically. Far too many folks involved in the momentum against civilization would too easily toss aside the work of anyone they found questionable.

There are a few major points that I found most significant in our letters and in Ted's writing in general. All of those points and discussions ultimately surrounded what it will take to destroy the technological system. Here Ted and I were largely in agreement, but there are differences.

As far as central agreements go, Ted does claim to be "anti-civilization":

*I fully agree that civilization is an evil to be eliminated if possible. But the problem of civilization is part of the technology problem. Civilization, in fact, resulted from a technological advance, namely, the development of agricultural techniques that made large-scale, sedentary, intensive agriculture possible. ... So the problem of getting rid of civilization is essentially identical with the problem of getting rid of a certain body of agricultural technology.<sup>1</sup>*

However, that certain body of agricultural technology, Ted claims, is not a feasible target. And in concrete terms he's right. You can't blow up cultural knowledge unless you destroy the people carrying it. Neither Ted nor I is really interested in that. I argue that the possibility for the survival of a large-scale agricultural society is highly unlikely after the collapse of our global civilization because of a severe loss in both knowledge and craft required and the erosion of lands that would have otherwise been farmed. If we can barely survive on a global system of mono-cropping, I have doubts about that system being resurrected on a large scale. I'm sure that it will happen on a micro-scale, but that's far beyond any reach I would or should have.

But there's something more here.

Ted and I share the same target: the modern technological infrastructure. It's a practical target. As Ted puts it:

*I concentrate on industrial-age technology simply from considerations of feasibility. Once the System has broken down people will have to give up most industrial-age technology, because that technology can't be used without the aid of the System.<sup>2</sup>*

But for me, that target is a feasible, concrete aspect of civilization, but it is not the only one. I'm interested in taking on the totality of civilization, which surpasses that infrastructure. That is why I talk about rewilding and resisting as two parts of the same thing. I think resistance against civilization must reach into all the places that civilization does. That goes deeper than the technological system to the domestication process itself. That is a significant difference between Ted and I. Though we both agree on the face of things about this, it turns out to be different in practice.

I am interested in talking about tearing apart civilized concepts of community, but also looking at what anarchistic, post-civilization societies may look like. I'm interested in talking about how people have lived and how we can live. Not to form a blue print for the consolidation of the anti-civilization revolution, but as something to put out there, to get people thinking; to unleash the primal war of body and soul.

That means having a deeper understanding of the origins of civilization. A deeper understanding of how the domestication process works. It entails discussion, action and unmediated connection. But the room for this kind of thing in Ted's revolution is minimal. There is one target, one focus: destroy the technological infrastructure.

Ted's conviction and devotion to this point has been a major point of contention between Ted and other anti-civilization anarchists. In 'Ship of Fools,' one of Ted's most infamous and perhaps his best essay, Ted was offering a glimpse of this, but I'm not sure the extent of what he envisioned really came out. That message, like the message of *ISAIF*, is the need "to build a movement that will be intensively and exclusively focused on the goal of eliminating technology and civilization." "But," he continues,

*we can't build such a movement unless we steer clear of the people (let's call them "victimization activists") who are obsessed with victimization issues.<sup>3</sup> (That is, racism, sexism, homophobia, animal abuse, etc., etc.) These people are extremely numerous in our society, and they come swarming to any rebel movement that is halfway congenial to them.<sup>4</sup>*

To a large degree, he's right. Any battle against racism, sexism, homophobia, animal abuse, and, he mentions in another letter, colonialism and imperialism,<sup>5</sup> in and of itself *will not* destroy civilization. Even more so, the vast majority of folks involved in any of those battles are not interested in destroying civilization. Those fighting for right's issues are indeed fighting for civilization, as Ted rightly puts it:

*The concept of 'rights' presupposes an organized social structure that has the power to tell people what they have a right to and what they do not have a right to. In other words, the concepts of*

*'rights' presupposes civilization.*

Furthermore, we “need a movement that will be completely independent of the leftists, the reformers, the pacifists, the ‘rights’ people, and that whole bucket of shit.”<sup>6</sup>

Though I’m not interested in a revolutionary movement, I completely agree with Ted about the need for anti-civilization folks to make a clear break with the Left, reformists, and that “whole bucket of shit.” But what that entails for Ted is different than how I see it. Considering that Ted has put friends of mine and fellow unabashedly anti-civilization anarchists such as John Zerzan and John Connor in that category, I had to ask if our definitions of Leftism and reformists was really the same. To which Ted replied:

*Actually we may not be too far apart in our understanding of what leftists and reformists are. Our disagreements may revolve more around a point that I have not yet clearly expressed: that certain viewpoints that are not in themselves leftist may attract large numbers of leftists to movements that hold those viewpoints.<sup>7</sup>*

So by merely raising issues like racism, sexism, homophobia, animal enslavement, colonialism, imperialism, and all the other “-isms,” we are guilty by association. These are deviations from our focus: destroying the technological system, or civilization as the case may be. For those of us who have fallen under severe criticism from Ted for being Leftist by association to certain causes see this as a significant difference.

All of these “-isms” are products of civilization and clearly are worth bringing up. Ted is wary of attracting Leftists and their baggage, which certainly does happen, but this is no reason to shy away from the issues. Actually it works to the opposite: it contextualizes these struggles. Leftists and reformists will take note and most will prove that they are in fact the enemies that Ted considers them. But I can never understand why that’s a reason for not bringing up what I see as completely relevant issues. I don’t think there is any hierarchy of causes, but I know that all “-isms” are an intrinsic part of civilization: they cannot and will not go away until civilization does. But if our resistance is going to be as totalistic as civilization, then these are issues that we need to be aware of.

But the revolutionary movement Ted sees has no room for this. Perhaps the greatest reason why is that he does not see all of these “-isms” as part of civilization, but as a part of humanity. Ted and I have argued these points to the ground, but at base, Ted views homophobia, sexism, and the like as being something nearly all human societies have tendencies towards. Some societies, he claims, are far more egalitarian, and definitely emphasizes that he would prefer societies would be, but insists that no societies are egalitarian despite what many of us see as mounds of evidence to the contrary.

His naturalization of homophobia and sexism has rightfully put some pressure on him. I don’t intend on really laboring the point here any further. But with this in mind, it becomes a bit more understandable why Ted would see these issues as intrinsically reformist/Leftist leaning. And, even more so, it becomes a bit more understandable why Ted’s revolution isn’t picking up a lot of constituents among anti-civilization anarchists.

It is important to understand that part of the reason that Ted seems hell bent on pointing out the lack of “true” egalitarianism among other human societies is to avoid over idealizing them. In this sense, he puts the problem of over idealization in the same context of his concerns about talking of the inevitability of collapse. He fears, and rather rightfully, that if someone believed what was said, but later found a counterpoint, they would reject everything they’ve realized through anti-technological or anti-civilization viewpoints. Or if they think the collapse is inevitable people will “be tempted to relax, sit on our hands, and just wait for the collapse.”<sup>8</sup>

His concerns are valid. But what I draw from this is not what Ted draws. I see it as reason to not only be honest in our critique, action, and motivations, but to not fear complexity. Too often revolutionaries are afraid that their audience understands critique better as rhetoric than those who could draw on something much larger and not always the most accessible. In this case, people will drop revolutionary thinking as quickly as they picked it up: because it was never internalized, their interactions and opinions are never given room. There’s a difference between presenting your critique and opinions and presenting the right party line. Revolutionaries stick to party lines, but that’s no reason why anyone else should.

There’s a difference between understanding how other societies work and making them into utopias. Just as there’s a difference between the conviction that civilization will collapse and the

understanding that we are active agents in that process, one way or another, and that role is extremely important which Ted argues as well. What Ted is saying is far from new: he's taken the framework and methods of old strong arm revolutionaries and updated the target.

As far as I can see it, revolution will never be able to overcome civilization. We need something different. We need something that can handle more complexity and move beyond rhetoric and party lines. For me, that is primal war: a physical, spiritual and psychological war waged against civilization and the domestication process itself. It is about the world we live in and the world we want to live in.

This is something Ted knows about, but would never have made a part of his manifesto. In the interview with Theresa Kintz and through our letters, Ted talked about the relationships that he developed with the region where he lived, the animals he hunted and watched. He talked about how he was pushed over the edge when developers were threatening the place he had come to love. When he realized that you couldn't escape the technological system. That is what drove him to action.

It is that spiritual connection that inspires me and demands some respect. It was that spiritual connection that threw aside any philosophical quibbles about what would be the best action that was needed and what morality limits certain types of action. Ted knew that something needed to be done and did something. Was it the most efficient or best action? Hardly, but it was significant (assuming again that Ted and FC are the same). But hindsight is always best. And with that hindsight, Ted offered one of his most important and controversial essays, 'Hit Where it Hurts'.<sup>9</sup>

The article has its setbacks, but too often those have stood in the way of seeing what Ted put on the table: an open discussion about what the most efficient targets might be for any group seeking to destroy the technological infrastructure. And again, his rather hardline stance on a strictly anti-technological movement comes through. He mentions that acts like smashing up chain stores and liberating animals are not revolutionary activities since they aren't threatening to the existence of the system.

That much is true. Smashing chain stores and liberating animals won't bring about the collapse of civilization, but I would hardly

consider them “pointless.” I elaborated on this in another essay,<sup>10</sup> but these are valid acts of rage and resistance. I don’t think anyone would say that they would destroy civilization in and of themselves, but they do undermine the grasp of the domesticators and the order that they have imposed upon us. They are significant.

And, of anyone, Ted should be aware of this. If we only consider actions that seriously threaten the technological system to be revolutionary then FC’s bombs and manifesto wouldn’t be considered revolutionary either. I don’t know if FC thought that the technological system would have come to its knees through that bombing campaign from the start but clearly “they” realized that wouldn’t happen in 1995 when the manifesto was sent out as an end to the bombing campaign. The action was more powerful in what it represented than what it accomplished. It brought the message that something can be done.

And ‘Hit Where it Hurts’ carries that message further. Five primary targets are proposed: the electric-power grid, the communications industry, the computer industry, the propaganda industry, and the biotechnology industry. Without these—we are told—the system will collapse. For the first three, that is absolutely correct. The system cannot survive without electricity, and with disruptions in the communications and computer industry, it can be assured that the system will not be able to get back online in the relatively short time span between civilization and a post-civilized world.

The propaganda industry and biotechnology industry need a bit more attention. I can understand the grudge Ted would hold towards the propaganda industry, but fighting it has *always* been an excessively uphill battle. As its own target, it is far too large. Granted, I wish it would be destroyed, but I don’t see it as a more viable target than the other ones mentioned in the article. Without electricity, the propaganda industry will be done, but I see little reason to believe it will happen beforehand.

The biotechnology industry makes much more sense. Biotechnology and nanotechnology are both vital frontiers to the advancement and continued existence of civilization. That makes them rather clear targets. But it makes sense as a frontier of civilization. In the same article, Ted considers the timber industry to be a “side issue,” and logically not a primary target. No doubt, most anti-civilization leaning folks involved one way or another

with the timber industry are well aware that they are not gaining ground.

But gaining ground is not necessarily the point. Maintaining ground is. The timber industry and a number of animal enslavers, like the biotechnology industry, all stand at the frontier between civilization and remaining wildness. If one is a viable target, why is action directed towards the others not part of that revolution? It comes back to the single-track attack and the difference between what an anti-technological movement and an anti-civilization momentum may look like.

Desires will always determine action.

I think that is the essential difference between Ted and me, which is why I keep pointing it out. He wants a strictly anti-technological revolution and I want to see the destruction of civilization coming through an aware and active momentum. More to the point, I'd like to see a revolt against domestication in the sense of a primal war.

That is definitely reflected in our different views and critiques. But that doesn't mean there aren't major points of agreement and solidarity. In his personal views, the world Ted wants to live in isn't all that different from the world I envision. But I can't see his revolution, or any revolution for that matter, taking us there.

I wouldn't question for a second that Ted's revolution is an anarchist revolution. He is wary of all the issues I've mentioned because he's rightly concerned that attempts to completely eliminate them would lead to another system where equality is the only enforceable law. He is ultimately concerned with the elimination of overarching systems of domination. But, again, I don't think a strictly destructive front is necessarily the only one available. Critique and action can coexist.

We do have much in common. As I see it, what Ted and FC have put on the table is extremely important and far too important to lose it to differences with Ted's perspectives. Taking on civilization is a tremendous task. Along the way we're going to have to learn what it means to be critical and we're going to have to look everywhere for something to help us along the way.

And for raising the bar and bringing important tactical issues up, we owe FC and Ted enough credit to take what is most relevant from their contributions seriously and act on it.

2005

*Endnotes*

1. Personal correspondence. January 18, 2002
2. Ibid.
3. Ted's side note: "I call these people leftists, but if you disagree I won't argue with you. It would be a waste of time to quibble about a semantic point."
4. Personal correspondence. January 18, 2002.
5. Personal correspondence. August 5, 2001.
6. Personal correspondence. November 4, 2002.
7. Personal correspondence. January 7, 2003.
8. Personal correspondence. August 23, 2002.
9. *Green Anarchy* no. 8, 2002.
10. Primal Rage, 'Hit Where it Hurts, But in the Meantime...' *Green Anarchy* no. 9, 2002.

# Hit Where It Hurts, but in the Meantime...

*Note: This article was published under the name “Primal Rage,” hence the we/us statements.*

## 1. The Purpose of this Article

The purpose of this article is to counter the authoritarian and limited advice offered by Ted Kaczynski in his piece, ‘Hit Where It Hurts’ (*Green Anarchy* no 8). This is an offering of possibilities of revolt against civilization, and we point out that it is one of many and we have no notions of grandeur as to a vantage point of ours. These are our words, an offering, to take what the reader sees fit. Our basic stance is this: by all means revolt should be, to some degree, tactical, but the heart of revolt is within each of us. Any act of revolt is generally not some mass, preplanned action, but the outcome of spontaneous rage: the natural response to oppressive, suicidal conditions. It goes without saying that when acting in self-defense that the defending person seeks to do the most damage possible. In almost every case of revolt this is generally applicable. The civilized mission to domesticate and exploit all life is by any definition an attack on life. Therefore, resistance will always be an act of self-defense. However, in this sense, not all revolt is equitable with the fight scenario that Ted uses as his analogy.

Revolt is not just a defined action, as Ted treats it, but any act of resistance against the civilized order. It is in this rage and spontaneity that we find the spirit of resistance. We feel limiting or degrading this spirit is to deny the reason we are fighting in the first

place, and that is dangerous.

## 2. Autonomy is our Goal

It seems apparent to us that the whole of civilization is accountable for our current state, and that true autonomy will be possible only from the destruction of that condition. The role of technology in this development (and the continuing of this) is undeniable. We agree that the technological system is the most viable of many targets in the fight for autonomy. In this we respect Ted's comments as to how to potentially disable that beast.

However, isolating this aspect can be very problematic. Ted states that activities such as "smashing up a McDonald's or Starbucks" are "pointless" and "not a revolutionary activity." It would be ridiculous to think that anyone truly feels that smashing up some corporate chain stores or factories will halt civilization, but what single action will? Any direct action is rage put to motion. It is literally striking a blow into the civilized order, and most importantly a strike against domestication. How could this be anything but revolutionary? No blow will be the single or great blow, and to expect such is idealistic at best.

Every act of resistance brings us one step closer to the realization of autonomy for all.

## 3. In Defense of Wildness

"[N]o one in his right mind believes anything like real wilderness can survive very long if the techno-industrial system continues to exist." This much is true, but few harbor notions that civilization will die easily. This creates a multifaceted form of resistance.

Our goals are twofold: to end the civilized existence and to keep it from consuming all the wildness that remains. If we put all our efforts into doing one thing, we risk the possibility of having nothing left for a post-civilized existence. We don't feel every action is a great or worthy one, but that is from our viewpoint. We have no part in legal actions, but know of people using them successfully to keep logging out of wild areas. Is logging those areas inevitable? Quite possibly, but I don't feel that those efforts necessarily drain from an effective revolt.

We must never forget that civilization is a totality, it encom-

passes every aspect of life, and we must resist the colonization at all levels and do what is possible anywhere. We feel the importance should always be on eliminating the overbearing presence and domination of civilization but this should never keep our eyes off what is happening here and now. Resistance is everywhere and revolt is life.

#### 4. Why the System Stands Strong

The system is truly durable through centuries of domination and exploitation. The State is primarily its own public relations firm and this keeps it strong. If we are to succeed as revolutionaries, we must break through that stronghold at every possible level.

The facade of democracy and any equation of government with freedom is a target and on this and every front we must seek to counter the apathetic, consumerist dogma. All government, technology, civilization is oppressive, capitalism candy-coats itself and this makes any form of revolt important.

#### 5. No Rage is Alike

Ted's treatment of "victimization issues" is a topic in itself, and so we'll only give it brief attention here. The favoritism in this society towards white males needs little background, but the outcome of that will usually be apparent. Those of us who come from such a position need to recognize the reality that the people Ted calls "victims" have their own source of rage. We should realize how that rage fits into the problem of civilization and embrace that revolt.

This isn't to say, "don't be critical," in fact we feel the exact opposite. We all have our own source of rage and contempt for civilization. This gives us the true beauty and power of revolt, and we should embrace that and take and give to it. Anyone who tries to determine whom someone should and shouldn't oppose is hardly fighting alongside that person (not that that should even necessarily be the case, but another point is to just be upfront about where you stand). Authoritarianism and elitism should be understood as tools of civilization, it is up to all of us to overcome this in our own ways.

#### 6. Attack with the Brain, Heart and Fist

We stand by the five targets that Ted points out in his sixth section. We feel that the only real danger here is the simplicity and ease with which he suggests that these be targeted. The way in which Ted implies getting rid of these organs makes it sound like we should all be effective anti-tech warriors.

This is just a pipedream, and anyone could tell you that the elves who pull off hits like Vail didn't just decide out of the blue one day to go burn it down. The most impacting of hits are going to be the biggest and in any case the maxim of maximum destruction, not minimal damage should be the principle. However, it really isn't smart to go out and try and burn down some huge building without knowledge or experience.

Like anything, eco-sabotage is a skill. It takes practice and confidence to pull off something really big, and it takes time to get there. Those little spontaneous actions, such as smashing some windows, gluing some locks, or even confronting people openly are stepping stones to something bigger. While this isn't any sole reason to embrace those, it's definitely a positive one.

To suggest jumping into a big action is a dangerous suggestion. It is important to follow your heart, but most important to trust your instincts. If you think something horrible may happen, by all means you should seriously weigh the possible outcomes or try again later. The costs of getting busted doing something without practice are way too high to chance. Practice makes perfect and every bit counts.

## 7. Give it All You Got

The points on biotech we will leave alone, since we agree in their importance as targets (although it's debatable that something can really blanket over everything else as *the* most important of targets). We hope that resistance will continually rise, and that seems to be the most likely case as the State tightens the leash and automation makes our lives all the more meaningless.

Our basic point here is that any act of revolt is a positive thing. While each may seem insignificant and even some may not have been the best decisions, those aren't grounds for not giving solidarity to those actions. We must realize that we are not fighting for some obscure academic principle, but for the sake of wild life itself.

More is weighing on this than any language could possibly attempt to sum up.

We feel that a major point that Ted seems to have overlooked in this instance is that the success of FC didn't come from the elimination of the technological industrial system, but by helping push the seriousness of it to another level. In the long run, offering a few representatives of technological progression, and the more common occurrence of improperly made bombs or targeting, may not have the impact that the ensuing text and attention did. This is something that we all need to learn from, that every little bit counts. While we should be looking tactically for a way to get rid of this whole mess of a system, we should do every bit possible to strike against it in everyday life.

2002

# Interview with Anarcho-Primitivist Kevin Tucker

Jae Carico, The Fifth Column.  
October 28, 2015

Kevin Tucker is an anarcho-primitivist writer based out of rural Pennsylvania. His focus is on a critique of civilization, domestication and technology through a comprehensive understanding of how power and oppression arise within societies, how humans have become mediated from wildness, and how, through rewilding, humans can reconnect with the wild and resist the forces of civilization. He is the author of *For Wildness and Anarchy* (Black and Green Press, 2010), co-founder of the Black and Green Network, editor of *Species Traitor* Journal, and currently founding editor of *Black and Green Review*.

*What got you started in social justice and what stimulated you to move toward green anarchism?*

The First Gulf War was really where it all started. I think Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun* had a pretty profound effect on me, but really it was the first instance I can remember where the reality of warfare just didn't feel remote. Scud missiles, all the bombs: this was people dying. That put some cracks in the foundation of being sold a fabricated perspective of the world. It really took off from there.

I grew up in St Louis, in Monsanto's back yard. In hindsight, I almost feel like that was the cloud that hovered over everything. St. Louis County served as a template for suburban sprawl, so you had all these woods just torn down without hesitation. All of that was replaced with subdivisions and hundreds of miles of strip malls. Peabody Coal has a headquarters there, the Ogoni people who survived the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and other resistors at the hands of Shell had all relocated there, the resistance to GMOs really took root; all of these things just contributed to furthering the cracks in that underlying narrative of civilization and progress.

In the midsts of affluence was just emptiness and despair.

The irony of that situation is that Cahokia Mounds is just outside of St Louis city limits. The Cahokia were a part of the Mississippian-Ohio River Valley complex, a network of native civilizations that rose and collapsed prior to European contact. You cross the river, go past all the oil refineries, and there are the remains of a collapsed civilization. That whole area is flat, so when you walk on top of these mounds you can actually see the future remains of our collapsing civilization from the vantage point of the ruins of a collapsed one.

Once my eyes started opening up it all really just came flooding in.

By 1993, I was calling myself an anarchist, doing zines and deeply emerged in activism. I defaulted on anarcho-syndicalism and would, like many at that time did, just incorporate contradicting strands in; earth and animal liberation, anti-technology and anti-industrialist leanings, Indigenous resistance, deep ecology, and eco-feminism. Nothing about anarcho-syndicalism was going to address any or all of those issues, but it took the anti-globalization riots of 1999 to really force me to confront ideas and wants that were at complete odds with each other.

What drove me further into green anarchism was just having that initial kind of shock going back to the Gulf War. Once you begin to question authority, it should open a door, not close the book. At the heart of that process of radicalization was a question: what is power? Where does authoritarianism begin and how does it perpetuate itself? I just kept digging and the stage was really set to incorporate all of these different angles. It started with focusing on capitalism and just snowballed from there. By the time I had gotten to agriculture through eco-feminism and deep ecology, it just started to get harder to go on pretending that anarcho-syndicalism

could provide solutions for the kinds of problems we clearly were enmeshed with.

The grounds were pretty ripe for having anarchists in the Pacific Northwest torching the streets and smashing windows to be followed up by John Zerzan taking center stage with his “it’s all gotta go” charisma and his work in terms of understanding the roots of civilization to back it up. On the Eve of the N30 Seattle Riots, I bought 3 of his books and read them all in one night. Here it was the underlying basis of authority lies in domestication. And, indeed, “it’s all gotta go.”

*What have you found to be the most pragmatic strategy for getting to a place where “it’s all gotta go” can become a reality?*

“It’s all gotta go” is our reality.

Nothing about civilization is or can be sustainable. This civilization, like all those before it, will collapse. What separates this civilization from others is that it exists on a global scale. There is no fall back option here. We don’t hit a point where we’re beyond the reality of diminishing returns and all of the sudden we have all this back up knowledge and technology to down grade to an earlier form of industrialism or anything.

The pragmatic side is understanding that reality: that we need to work with the collapse that’s already in progress. To aid and assist rather than to think we’re going to control how civilization has some mythical crash landing. Or thinking there’s going to be an anarcho-primitivist revolution where things suddenly shift seamlessly into an immediate return, nomadic hunter-gatherer reality.

I think that’s an important guide to understand what might be considered “activism” or “strategy” in terms of holding our ground and taking back more as we can. Understanding that civilization and technology are doomed to their own failure gives a certain vantage point to understanding how it is that they are able to perpetuate themselves. In our case, that’s the electrical grid and an increasingly technologized and wide spread economic reliance upon a society in fragments. So many things need to happen as planned in order to make this whole globalized system work. It’s unfortunate that it does work, but to believe that it is invulnerable or permanent is just falling for a lie.

The truth is that every civilization that collapsed didn’t col-

lapse for any single reason: it was a culmination of causes that became insurmountable for politicians and priests to merely bandage and overcome. That's worth keeping in mind as we're nearing or past the global peak of cheap oil, that resource wars over water are as fatal as ones over oil, that in places like Syria we're already seeing the first major refugee crisis to come from abrupt climate change. Everywhere you look we're seeing collapse happen, the economy and political turmoil is just a sampling of what is to come. We become enchanted with this idea that "the collapse" will be an event. It's not. It's a process that's well underway. We have no idea what the full on tipping point is going to be, but the pieces are all in place for changing weather patterns, droughts, floods, diseases, and the like to just be the final straw. There's some real urgency here, there's no time to sit around and think up the perfect plan or strategy: we have to claim our turf and act on it.

It took me a long time to overcome my own revolutionary tendencies. I see revolution as the last hold out of my inner politician and it took some time to come to terms with that. There won't be an easy and overarching moment, answer, or sweeping change that makes it so that everything will end okay. In terms of eventuality, I say we have a lot within us to draw on and to grow from as we are innately nomadic hunter-gatherers in mind, body, and spirit, but we have a ways to go before we get back there from here. In questioning revolution, I kept bumping up against this cycle that repeats throughout history: why do Indigenous resistance movements so often end in death before encampment while revolutions end in gallows?

It's almost shockingly simple really: you can kill for an ideology, but you will die for a known. Ideas, principles, revolutionary values; they are hollow promises of Progress, a hope that we can do a better job than the last managers and programmers at fixing the flaws in our imperfect society. In rejecting civilization, rejecting progress is a pretty crucial step. What kept Indigenous societies intact and on edge is that they lived and breathed a functioning society.

Of course, "Indigenous" is a huge spectrum and that's a broad statement, but when contrasted with Modernity, these are societies that, by and large, understood the relationship between place and society, that they understood the roles that each person needs to fulfill, that the spiritual world is as vital as the material one; these

are cultures that exist within their own continuum and parcelling them out is simply not an option. Their inhabitants weren't torn apart by existential questions and they weren't spending their entire life trying to find some semblance of meaning: these are things that were implicit. As such, they were defensible. They remain indivisible from life itself.

And so they fought. In many places, they continue that fight.

I think there's a lot to learn from that. How that fight plays out may not always be ideal, but we need a lot of options on the table. We have seen where things don't work (ie, politics) and draw from that, but the short version is really this: collapse is happening; we all fare better if it happens sooner than later. We need to understand that civilization is perpetuated by some vast percentage of seven billion humans waking up every day and making it work. We have agency here, we perpetuate the collapse of civilization by taking part in its endless consumption of the finite world or we can perpetuate the collapse of civilization by embracing and integrating with all that is wild within this world. By fighting alongside the wildness that has always resisted domestication we can reclaim our lives.

We can take that understanding of collapse and develop a deeper understanding about where civilization is most vulnerable and apply pressure to shrink those bottlenecks. That can look like an almost infinite number of things, but it's most important to start somewhere and keep applying that pressure always.

*How can we decolonize ourselves and start fighting against dominant culture?*

I think it's vital to recognize that we, everyone of us, is born a nomadic hunter-gatherer. I see this in my daughters constantly: we are born wild. The central myth of civilization is that domestication was a historic event rather than a constant and on-going process. We are constantly taking part in these narratives of power where our participation is taken as implicit rather than complicit.

Decolonization, for the most part, is very specific: it's about communities reclaiming their cultures and traditions from colonizers. But I see decolonization as a part of the rewilding or undomestication process. It's about staking our place in the world of wildness, it's about finding grounding. We are wild beings that are held captive. And we carry a ton of baggage with us. All of us are

damaged, we are thrown into a situation where our minds and bodies can't process the overwhelming and exhausting input and noise of the technosphere, where we feel like we are stuck in these pointless cycles of work, spend, tweet, and repeat. We are sold *a narrative* as *the narrative*: how we are is how we were meant to be, but things will get better.

But there are other story lines. We have millions of years of them. It's only a tiny fraction of our human timeline that has even diverged from hunting and gathering and only a fraction of that has been exposed to industrialism. It's my hope that one day our descendants can see it as an almost insignificant fraction, but that's not the world we live in now.

In our world, the remaining Indigenous societies are a threat for multiple reasons: the first and foremost is that many of them live in areas that were largely inaccessible before or even unappealing to the State. The constant hunger for resources and need for growth envision those landscapes that these societies know as home differently. To civilized eyes, these societies are standing in the way of giving us another fix and they are under constant attack to finalize the processes of extermination that have long taken foot.

The other reason is that any other way of life, any semblance of lives lived without misery, is a threat to the narrative. We comply because we are taught that we have no other option, that any alternative would only be more miserable than what we're working through right now within Modernity.

Decolonization requires that we force ourselves to reconcile the reality of our situation against the reality of the societies that have been struggling all along. Rewilding is there to guide and find place and grounding. It is vital because wildness is everywhere: this isn't wilderness, this isn't a retreat or location. But we need to establish our own baseline in the world, because domestication just alienates and removes us so far from everything that we, as wild beings, should know.

Without grounding, we will never be able to cross that threshold. We will never get a glimpse of life without domestication. We'll never feel or connect to anything without mediation. We will never get to that point where we can truly resist.

*Are there any historical or contemporary organizations you see as being effective in these methods?*

Organizations is a tricky word. If we're talking about formal organizations, then the options that I care for drop drastically. I have a lot of sympathy with Earth First! even though the Journal doesn't always make it easy. I openly support some advocacy groups that are set on staking and defending turf, but not as much about destroying civilization. They are what they are.

If you get outside the realm of organization, then things open up significantly.

Here you have all variations of Indigenous resistance, you have the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front, and things of that nature. I think the native pipeline and extraction resistance stand offs are some of the most promising things to happen within my lifetime. I'm speaking in particular about the Unist'ot'en stand off and the Mi'kmaq uprising. Both of which have been really vital in just showing what "stand your ground" looks like.

The threat we're facing right now is a world where peaked cheap energy is a daily reality. The place I've considered home for some time now is in the heart of the Marcellus Shale. I've seen what the frontier of extraction looks like. I've seen places that I love be destroyed by fracking. I've lost a family member to the toxins that they're spewing.

There's a psychological distance that we have within this hyper-domesticated framework. We have no community to fall back on and connect with. So when you're seeing these communities come together and resist, it makes so much more sense why you're not seeing that throughout the shale fields. Don't get me wrong, there is some really impressive work being done to oppose fracking, tar sands, mountain top removal and all the pipelines, but clearly the scale is different. We still feel like we have too much to lose because we don't have that grounding. What these communities are doing is where we all should be. That's why that baseline is so important. That's how rewilding gives grounds for resistance.

We desperately need to break that divide. We have to feel on that level so we can resist on that level.

All of that harks back to these wars against colonizers that exist every single place that civilization has and is expanding into. In the area I live in, that included the Pontiac Rebellion, but there are examples everywhere of resistance that was impeded by the sheer ability to replace the cannon fodder of the colonizing forces.

Apache warriors were insanely effective; there was something to the effect of 10 Apache shots fired successfully compared to one shot per soldier. The only reason that they were defeated was that the Americas could just keep throwing more and more lives on the line.

I always like to keep the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 in mind. The Pueblo Revolt was really strategic in terms of understanding that the Southwestern US was an outpost of colonization. The lifeline of that colony was coming upriver, so the Pueblo used those cycles to plan attacks and then targeted the supply chain.

The upside to all of this is that the more technologically dependent we become, the easier it is to target that system. We're not going to defeat civilization through field combat. It's just never going to happen like that and fortunately that doesn't need to happen. If the grid is disabled or collapses, then the entire facade crumbles. The might of political power shows its true face as a theater with bombs in supporting roles.

And the grid is highly susceptible to attack.

What I find really fascinating is what we've reported on in *Black and Green Review* no 1 and 2 in terms of these attacks on power substations and fiber optic cables. I think the number is something like 3-4 times per week that there is some seemingly small attack on the grid within this country and that seems to indicate that these attacks are just reactions, people are fucking furious for so many reasons and they attack. At least from what we know, there's no organization here and, again, there might not need to be. These things are just sitting out there and the reason they aren't attacked is because people believe that we need the grid to survive.

Turns out that we don't, but machines definitely do.

### *What have you learned from Indigenous struggles?*

Everything.

That ideologies can only get you so far. If you want to see real resistance, then you need to feel it. You need to feel the pain of the land, the pain that wildness bears. This is our community. There's a book that I absolutely love called *In the Days of Victorio*. It's Eve Ball's retelling of discussions with James Kaywaykla, a Warm Springs Apache who was born and raised during this time of massive uprooting and attempts to colonize. His story is really showing

the insanity of the frontier, being a child raised in a time of war, but it's not just a war memoir, the battles become background to Kay-waykla talking with intensity and passion about the Apache way of life. Even during this horrifically traumatic time, they didn't lose this sense of community and grounding. It might have even become amplified. There's a lot in there, but it just shows how much we've lost in the domestication process and how much we have to gain through undoing it.

We need that grounding, we need that reality check, and we need that sense of community. This toxic notion of the self that civilization requires and Modernity champions is just isolation. Our values are so off. We end up dying alone, drowning in junk and distraction.

*Any tips on rewilding?*

The biggest tip is to always remember that rewilding is a process. Domestication is a continuum, not an event. For us, that re-immersion into the wild is going to be a matter of generations. As a parent, that's kind of refreshing because you can see that wildness in children. We have a lot to learn from them.

I certainly don't want to pretend that I'm some kind of guru, I'm learning along the way just like anyone else. For me, it was really important to come to terms with what I call "radical humility." Essentially being able to just get over the way that this really rationalized worldview clouds our vision. I'm a big fan of questioning the logic of the scientific worldview, obviously we're not going to shed ourselves of it, nor should we be wanting to throw out every single thing that we've gotten from science: the world, after all, is burning. There's a lot we have to understand and act upon within a global scale.

At the same time, we can really fill in those holes through direct experience and interaction. We tend to carry all these arbitrary distinctions and scientific classifications with us into the wild, all these divisions and complex studies of minutiae. There is a lot out there and plenty to learn; yet it really comes together when you remove those barriers. You have to get over yourself and this really book-based sense of figuring things out. It's harder than it seems, but there are these points of cross over that you get through just shutting up and observing the symbiosis of wild beings and that entire community where life and connection really just becomes

apparent.

When you get out of your head a bit, things become more manageable. I think many of us come into rewilding as if it was a task or series of tasks. Plenty of people have made a lot of money off of selling rewilding as a checklist of skills, both in this militaristic, survivalist sense and this really watered down, apathetic feel-good sense. Enskilling is certainly an important thing, but until we come to embrace the whole of wildness and to trust in it, then it's all just survivalism. Granted that's how we're raised within civilization where our only security blanket is electricity.

That's what needs to be broken down.

So, in terms of tips, there is no replacement for dirt time. I think what sets rewilding apart from the voyeurism of day hiking and the like is it all starts in observation, but rewilding moves beyond that into integration. That's all a process.

Community is really important to that. Getting out there with other people and sharing those experiences is a huge help. I spent years thinking I was going to memorize manuals and then just retain all of the knowledge, but that's monumental. Taking steps is really important; I like to give myself challenges. Foraging wild mushrooms has been a huge thing for me, it can take you out of your comfort zone, but it also changes the way that you see in the forest and engages multiple senses at once. Bird language is really a kind of quick view into what's happening and really crucial. Tracking helps to kind of walk in another beings' footprints. If you want to be humbled, go track a fox. If you don't make it a chore, then it's really invigorating. It gets in your bones. It'll change the way you view the world. It adjusts the way we take in information and you can realize quickly how overwhelming civilization really is. We deaden ourselves to the world to just get by floating through this tunnel vision.

That should feel absolutely enraging. I see rewilding as a spiritual journey, but it's hard to even try going through the steps of all of these processes and not end up at this same point of feeling and seeing the connectivity between all life. It's impossible to not feel empathy with a fox while tracking them unless you're wearing \$1000 in high-tech hunting gear. The more those barriers break, the more that pain creeps in. Only it was there all along, we just learn from an early age to turn that off.

I do have one big tip though, it's easy to get used to the ease of having 4G and WiFi connected devices on us all the time and to use that for things like identification or quick resources. The convenience there is really what kills the purpose there: if we're not really engaging, doing things like asking another person in real life or searching through field guides, then we're not creating a deep neurological response within our brains to really let that information sink in.

I always recommend Nicholas Carr's work on the consequences of these new technological platforms and interfaces and this instance is no different. Engaging with machines doesn't turn into long-term memories and our brains begin to offset our mental storage capacity onto Google. I can't recommend that in general, but certainly even less so in terms of trying to identify and learn about wilderness.

*Do you see hacking as being an effective tactic?*

I can certainly appreciate it, but I just have no real faith in machines, even in terms of using them to break machines. I'm happy to be proven wrong. I think Anonymous does some pretty awesome things and I think all the data dumps are vital information. Outside of that, if hackers can take down the grid, which is what I hear on the news, then what are they waiting for?

My own bias is that I greatly prefer not to be on machines. The amount that someone like me would have to learn to hack is astronomical. Throwing rocks is a lot easier.

*What are your thoughts on Ted Kaczynski?*

That's pretty complicated really. We were writing these huge letters for years and there were points of agreement and points of disagreement. I won't go over all of that again here, but I will say that there's a human side of Ted that I feel for and empathize with, it's just unfortunate that he buries that.

Ted's context is that he left Berkeley in the 60s and went off to the woods. So he carries all this Maoist baggage with him and that's where this staunch drive for a singular vision and attack comes from. But he goes out into the woods and gets further and further tied into it. He's talked to me about how rabbits were almost like

a guide for him. He just got rooted and felt the infringement just clamp down. And he acted upon that.

In his eyes, he needed to hold technocrats accountable for their actions. That's been the inspiration for Ted as it has seemingly been for groups like Individualists Tending Towards the Wild (ITS), Wild Reaction, and Obsidian Point—none of which do I support in the slightest. In smaller worlds, that has worked. We're talking effectively about terror campaigns and political assassinations. With the hyper-modern world we inhabit, there are just so many of those positions and so many people to fill them. I'm not shedding a tear for technocrats, but I think the tactic needs a massive scale to be effective. The more Google becomes the true evil forecast throughout dystopian fiction, the more people might keep getting pissed and targeting them, with or without larger standing affiliations or justifications.

I'm far from a pacifist, but the upside to our circumstance is that our targets need not be human. If we're talking about effectiveness, then the machines are the bigger problem than the operators. Flesh, sadly, is seen as more replaceable than circuitry: something we're reminded of every time we buy something out of a Foxconn factory.

The Maoist side though is what drives the unapologetic sense of militarism: the refusal to reconcile the loss of life that comes when a bomb doesn't hit its intended target. You get the same kind of lingo that comes from the military when, or I should say, if, they have to respond to things like how at least 90% of drone strike victims are civilians or bombing a Doctors Without Borders hospital. I just don't have the stomach for that stuff, but I'm not a Maoist or a patriot.

There's a whole other side of this question that leans towards the kind of garbage Kaczynski and his followers have wanted to do in terms of attacking "primitivist romanticism."

I get where he's coming from with that: we need to keep our feet on the ground, but the purpose is political and I'm not a political person. Ted wants to keep the focus solely on technology, which, from a strategic angle, I definitely agree with. But he believes there will be a revolution against the machines. There's a whole lot wrapped up in that notion and a lot of romanticization of revolutionary ideals.

What underlies that argument is to say that we—anarcho-prim-

itivists and green anarchists—are more about propaganda than that anti-technological revolutionary whatever it is. And that's false positioning. I'm not sure why we're targets for that, but in holding this hardline stance, it's ironic that this Maoist impulse leads calling us "leftists" by obscuring our drive.

Neither myself nor any other anarcho-primitivist looks to hunter-gatherers to find the perfect wild human animal. That would be romantic idealism.

All of us are human. It's that simple. I don't need hunter-gatherers to be perfect, I don't need them to be angels: I just see human societies that function. All humans, us included, can go overboard. But the way that immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies function is built around dealing with the downsides of being human: how to mitigate disagreements, how to diffuse social tension, how to keep egalitarianism up front and center.

We come from this same sense of primal anarchy, but we have also grown up within a culture where superstructures are both overbearing and omnipresent. So even though anarchists talk about hating the police, we still have a hard time envisioning what it's like to live without them. There's a lot of accountability that has to come into play.

We have a lot to learn and it's got to be these issues, about how truly anarchistic societies have dealt with the world, which we have to learn from. It's their means of dealing with being imperfect that we have to learn from. The rest is just really icing on the cake. I'm not sure what advantage we might get from feeling like we need to disregard our real anarchist (pre)-history, but I'm not buying it. Certainly seems more relevant than talking forever about the Paris Commune or the Spanish Civil War.

*Do you have any thoughts on radical feminism?*

This really comes down to the garbage that Derrick Jensen, Lierre Keith and Deep Green Resistance (DGR) have tried reviving and dumping into the "anti-civilization" milieu, right? So I'll get right to it: gender is a culturally defined reality with a certain degree of cultural norm. Patriarchy is a historical creation that put a valuation on gender.

This all comes down to domestication.

We know that Indigenous societies almost universally don't succumb to a binary understanding of gender. There's flux there

and there's plenty of precedent within the natural world that a dualistic perspective of gender and sexes just isn't cut and dry. It's not just humans, but it's the efficiency of production that requires some degree of standardization, and hierarchies are based around that. I just don't understand how any "radical" vision can't just grant that trans-persons are targets in this society because they challenge the standardized gender and sex roles within this civilization. It really blows my mind. There is no question to me that being born in a body that defies what the cultural norms for how someone feels and relates with the world happens. I don't know what that feels like, but who the fuck has the right to cheapen that to the point of being a gimmick or far worse.

I'm no fan of the medical industry, I'll state that, but that's just the tip of this entire reality. We all have our baggage, so I'm not sure why someone like Derrick—who can poke holes in the idea that "taking shorter showers" isn't going to change the world—is suddenly giving a fuck about someone dressing and acting in relation to how they feel and are perceived.

It really is that simple.

The degree to which the DGR crew has gone—supporting and taking part in groups that seek to out trans-persons—is just fucking despicable. Just look at the news! Trans-people are being targeted and killed every week, most likely far more often than that. I have no idea how any of those trans—"call out" fuckers can sleep at night. I had many reasons to start going after them before all of that nonsense came out and I'm not sure why it took the anarchist world so long to figure it out, but I think it's good that this issue really deflated their insane trajectory and "organization."

The discussion about trans-persons always brings to mind this example that comes from Pierre Clastres, an anarchist anthropologists whose life was sadly cut short by a car accident, in terms of the Aché in the Amazon. He talked about these instances of trans-identity and how this facet of life really was just kind of understood without question or consequence. The only thing that mattered was whether or not that individual was participating in the community, not in a breeding sense, but just overall contribution. It's the exact same expectation applied to anyone else.

I'm not really sure of any reason why that shouldn't be understood universally.

*Do you have any recommendations for media and reading?*

I could really go on about this one for ages, so I'll try to keep it short.

In terms of media, I think it's really important to just avoid social media. It's beyond the low point that we all thought we hit with a 24-hour "news" cycle. It's just dealing on a purely emotional level with no resolution and no permanence. We just react to everything and it involves everyone. It's one reason that people are just boiling over the top constantly. Psychologically speaking, that shit is a fucking mess. Yet it can be almost totally avoided.

It's complicated. 1.3 billion people on this earth log in to Facebook at least once per month. That's massive, yet the number continues to grow. Half of the world's adult population owns a cell phone. There is no precedent for this kind of monumental social and technological change and intrusion. That's scary. Nothing in the lineage of humanity is as universal as the cell phone until you get back to when the world was predominantly hunting and gathering. And even then the methods and tools used were far from universal.

So that really, really needs to be taken into consideration.

I can't miss the chance to plug *Black and Green Review*, a newish anarcho-primitivist journal that I'm an editor and founder of. I think the crew we have involved and the direction we've been heading in is really promising. The kinds of discussions that we've been having while working on pieces is far more intensive than any other publication I've ever worked on. The discussions I've been having with people about it are the same. We have a long way to go to get this momentum building and on fire again, but we have a lot of the right pieces falling into place.

Hopefully people reading it feel the same. Either way, the hope is that we get more involved in these non-internet based formats and discussions. That's what's going to push this forward, not just perpetually sharing and liking things on whatever social media outlet takes over.

In terms of reading, the people who have really shaped my perspectives and opened my eyes are John Zerzan, Fredy Perlman, Chellis Glendinning, Paul Shepard, and Lewis Mumford. There are certainly others, but those four really pushed things in the necessary direction for me. I read a lot of anthropology and some of it

gets far more technical than others, but there's just so much there. The work of James Woodburn, Richard Lee, Colin Turnbull, R Brian Ferguson, Douglas Fry, Pierre Clastres, and so many more has been and continues to be crucial. Nicholas Carr's work on technology is vital for the society we live in. Paul Rezendes, Mark Elbroch, Jon Young, and Tamarack Song have some excellent books in terms of the rewilding process.

*As a parent what advice do you have on raising children?*

As a parent, the most obvious thing that I come up against is the lack of community. That just makes everything so much harder. Our perceptions about how children should be treated and raised are just a distillation of the worst parts of civilization. There's no empathy or care there, just distancing and this paternalistic sense of "breaking them in" that permeates it. You bring in the excesses of this hyper-technological Modernity and we've seen how far past the tipping point things get.

The expectation is that when you have kids you default on cultural norms. Not just in your own life, but in your children's. I'm no proponent of trying to have some virtuous claim to being the perfect living example of how you should live, but if you can't apply these critiques to raising children then we've all failed. This is where the practical application really does matter.

Raising kids can be both really wearing and invigorating at the same time. If you don't get furious when you have to explain to a child why they can't just drink from a creek, stream or lake then I'm not sure what it would take. That should hit home. It's the hardest part of being a parent really. My daughters are wild, they want to be naked and play outside, but how do you try to explain that they have to wear clothes because there are pedophiles all around? We're just robbing our kids of their childhood and their comfort within the world.

There's a lot of compromise in that regard and it's really difficult, but that's where community helps. You need to define your lines and defend them. Breaking down those barriers and having your child present and involved is crucial. Ensuring that they get what they need instead of loading them down with vaccinations, garbage food, sugar, and letting them play with WiFi devices, things like that really do matter and have consequences.

They humble you all the time too. It's easy to forget that their vision, hearing, and senses are open doors unless we close them. Seeing what my daughters spot is always impressive. One of my daughters has tried stinkbugs twice! She apparently didn't like it either time, but she had no hang ups from trying it a second time. Spending a lot of time barefoot means that their feet haven't conformed to this narrow shoe wearing contortion we create. I've always admired the dexterity of hunter-gatherer's feet and I see it in my daughters. Stuff like that is really encouraging to me.

The hardest part is dealing with that external situation, family, and people like that tend to mean well, but our default is just consumption. We immerse ourselves in consumerism, but, as a culture, we bury our kids in it. I love the Inuit quote that "gifts make slaves like whips make dogs." Stuff is a burden, that's one reason why we were meant to be nomadic. We should see it as an indication of how deep the pathology of domestication goes when we use stuff as a fill-in for experience and expressions. All in all, it's complicated, but it's a reminder about seeing rewilding in terms of generations and not getting wrapped up in yourself and the inflated sense of the self that Modernity touts.

*Is there ever a time when you think about how big the universe is and how crazy it is that we've made this horrible... magic... from our determined imagination and you ever just want to play Fallout 4 or Metal Gear Solid and listen to some post rock, and proclaim, "we're all gonna get burned up by the sun one day! And from the window of the universe, from which everything is small, there are thousands of livable planets, our political problems even in the macro are micro," or go all nihilistic and or purely spiritual? How do you fend off apathy, despair, grief, etc?*

I can't say I get caught up in any of those things. We all have our release valve, that's for sure. I'm not sure I have a solution for any of those things other than to just kind of suck it up and work through them. These days it feels like I have a lot less time, so I can't get caught up in getting lost with that stuff. You just have to find your avenues and keep pushing.

Fortunately or not, my real grounding comes from being with my family in the forest. Civilization is fairly inescapable and the further you try to retreat, quite often the more it weighs that it's

still lingering there. And yet wild beings find a way to carry on, to struggle, to etch out their own places, to stake their turf and to hold their ground.

It would be easy to get lost in it all, to just pretend like it isn't happening. But then again, it's a lot more empowering to get to that point and realize that we're not in this alone, all wild beings are fighting for their lives. They're ready for us to wake up and fight alongside them.

*What do you say to those who think that actions of an anti-civ variety will, at this point, only bring about totalitarianism; that we don't have enough numbers to mount an effective resistance and/or that if we just wait technology may save us?*

I'm not really sure how bringing down civilization will bring about totalitarianism. Frankly that's pretty illogical to me.

Here's the thing, when we're talking about civilization: we're not talking about taking over the steering wheel; we're talking about cutting the gas line. Political power functions solely because it has the electrical power to back it up. We fall in line because we believe that we have no other options in the matter. We treat money and power like they have innate value because we are taught that they do. As soon as power stops flowing, that entire facade crumbles.

But that's all just part of the narrative. I suppose this question might also be leaning towards thinking that the collapse of civilization will bring about some kind of Mad Max dystopia. We believe that kind of thing because we believe that power is a universal, a given. The reason we have police isn't because we can't be trusted around each other, it's because we believe the lie that police are there to keep us safe from each other. Never mind that civilization is doing all of the breaking here and creating the social tensions that lead to large-scale violence.

All of this harks back to Hobbes' proclamation that humans in the "state of nature" live nasty, brutish, and short lives. We know that this isn't true. The myth is still prevalent because it is necessary, that's part of that narrative of domestication that feeds back into our lives on a daily basis. It's a lie. What we see in instances of disasters or of functioning communities isn't wanton violence, but cooperation. That is what is within us. No species would have made it as long as we have if it was as

bloodthirsty as the civilized human has become. We breed the conditions under which we become insatiably violent. Warfare is an unknown amongst immediate return hunter-gatherers (nomadic hunter gatherer bands without stored food). Violence is a part of our emotions as an animal, but organized violence is not. Nomadic hunter-gatherer life is built around diffusing possible tensions before they arise.

We transpose our anxiety and tensions onto life without civilization. But think about it; we live in a society of strangers, we almost universally don't choose our neighbors—hell most likely we don't even talk to them or know their names. There are no strangers in the world of grounded peoples. There are millions of lines of connections. Everyone knows someone else or their relatives. So all this random violence that we see and fear, it simply doesn't exist. Within a city, you can act in horrifically violent ways and there's a good chance that you'll never be caught or face repercussions. Or worse, you can have a badge and your violence comes with its own justifications.

When you remove power, you remove that veneer: we are forced to become responsible for our subsistence and our actions. As great of a grip that power has on our lives, that reality is a very thin line.

Will there be holdouts? Will there be crazed rednecks with generators and guns? No doubt, but I'm not sure how long that survivalist mentality can really last. And nothing is stopping extreme violence from happening in this society. Yet when we're talking about ending civilization, we're talking about removing the means by which all of those avenues of power arise and sustain themselves.

There's also a flip side to this question though. This kind of question can only be asked from a position of First World privilege: we're assuming that life is less violent now than it could be. The reality is that we have sadly accepted that things like school shooting and mass shootings are just a part of life. We are the only nation in the world where this is happening every week and there's seemingly a threshold of bodies before that even makes the news.

That's not to overlook the insane reality of rape. The recorded number of women who have been physically and/or sexually assaulted in the US is one in three. We know that number is far from complete. But how do we live with that? How do we defend a system in which the nation that proclaims being the benchmark of free-

dom has had one third of its women assaulted? That's vile. There's no other way to put it.

Even putting that aside, we have to consider that this First World notion that our lives have been improved by civilization applies to a fraction of the current human population. To the Indigenous nations of the world, civilization is genocide. Ecocide is genocide. This is violence. Our want for resources and rare earth minerals for a technological gadget with a built-in shelf life of one year is systemic violence.

Think about a 14-year-old child in Afghanistan, a child who has only ever known war. That child has learned that if they want to go outside and play, the only time that they can do it is on a cloudy day because drone cameras can't see and so they won't strike. Think about all the family members that this child has seen die. Think about the impacts of depleted uranium in this and all other countries. Think about the children who are drowning in the Mediterranean Sea as they attempt to flee Syria: a nation torn by war that comes on the back of climate change induced droughts and longer standing water right feuds.

Think about the fact that if we don't make drastic changes immediately in terms of emissions (think down to zero), that we could see human extinction within less than 100 years.

Think about the workers crushed in the Rana Plaza sweatshop collapse in Bangladesh. Over 1,000 people who died simply so that largely First World consumers could buy slightly cheaper clothes for the season.

This isn't a hypothetical. We will not die without oil. We simply don't need it, but this system does. And yet every single drop of oil, of redirected water, of dioxin, of glyphosate, of diamonds, of copper ore: every little piece of every little thing that we possess or taut as a sign of our achievements is covered in death and destruction.

If we believe for a single second that our way of life is less violent than whatever comes after the power shuts off, it's solely because we're privileged enough to take part in the deadliest delusion that this world has ever seen. It means that we've internalized the failings of this culture as our own failure to achieve within their dreams. That we believe that stuff has meaning.

I don't know what will happen when the lights finally go out. I simply don't. But we have millions of years of cooperation guid-

ing our minds. We have thousands of years of examples of the collapse of civilizations not being the end of every inhabitant. Given the choice, we have so much more to embody than the promises of machines. I look at the world around me, I look at the news or go out in public, there's little reason to have hope that we can turn the madness off, but we can never heal a wound that is still being inflicted.

I don't know what's going to happen, but it can't be worse than this.

I don't take claims that "technology will save us" seriously at all.

Even within the timeline of civilization, technological change represents such a tiny fraction and electrified civilization is even less than that. We're just plowing through resources and all the "great ideas" about "sustainable" energy are built upon increasingly rare minerals. Even in Ray Kurzweil's ridiculous ideas about the coming Singularity, his much beloved predictions are slacking in terms of what machines "should" be doing by now and his only response to resource depletion is that one day we'll build a smart enough machine that can figure the whole mess out.

But cross Kurzweil's timeline with the current climate predictions. If we get that far, there likely won't be a human left on this planet to applaud the ingenuity of the machines that his distorted dreams hope to see outlive us.

*How do you counter arguments that say primitivists are ableist not thinking about the many people with disabilities that couldn't survive without civilization?*

I think this question is so loaded with the idea that somehow civilization is doing a good job handling disabilities. It isn't. I'm not sure how requiring wheel chair access changes the fact that all of these headline filling arguments about medical coverage still hasn't made the supposed "saving grace" that is medical technology more accessible. At least not without paying forever for it.

But this also shows how much we embody these virtues of civilization; we really want to believe that our lives are better. This is demonstrably untrue. The number one cause of death in this country remains heart disease, which comes down to diet, lifestyle, and stress. And you can work down the list, but what you see is that we

are all sick, we are all broken. Civilization fractures us in so many ways and forces us into impossible situations. And then on top of that we just continue to throw in medications, toxins, radiation, stress, work, concrete, and just all the weight that we carry around by being stuck in survival mode. We have no autonomy here. We have no involvement in our own subsistence. We are wage slaves re-branded as consumers, and we identify and present ourselves based on our consumption habits.

Civilization is systematically disabling. The diseases we face are almost universally caused by domesticated, sedentary life. The major diseases that we know all come from agriculture, from living with domestic animals, and from living with our own shit. It's overwhelming. We see this psychological break happen and we just keep looking for anyway to treat it without dealing with the underlying issue: that we are wild beings that are held captive. Every time you walk past some person walking mindlessly around slouched over and tapping away on their phone, that person is looking for that piece of themselves that they lost through domestication. We want community: this isn't something that capitalists created, it's an impulse redirected and commodified.

If we're going to heal, we need to stop the wound from being inflicted.

And we need to stop thinking that all of our knowledge is some monumental achievement. It took civilized minds thousands of years to understand the flow of blood, but anthropologist Elizabeth Marshall Thomas pointed out that the hunting and gathering !Kung knew how that flow works in detail, just like they understood the relationship of the Earth to other planets and the cycles of the moon.

We're just so stuck in this obscure reflection of ourselves as the apex of evolution that we can't see beyond it. There are mounds of evidence showing surgery and the healing of bones in societies without civilization. There are mounds of evidence that all of these peoples lived without the ailments that we assume that we are stuck with or that we can't move beyond. We assume that anyone who was crippled would be left out to die, yet there are records of all these Indigenous societies where members were maimed by colonizers (the European colonizers were quite fond of removing limbs), yet they still remained active members of their communities and carried on.

That's something I've even seen working within Amish communities. If the community is intact, they can help to heal and to move on. That's something that we are sorely missing. Not the medical industry and the toxin spewing, disease causing dual blow of industrialism and agriculture.

And the point needs to be made again; these arguments only work when we consider some level of distance between civilization and its consequences. We can't continue to overlook the children born with defects caused by depleted uranium, the children born with Chernobyl heart, the children who continue to suffer the consequences of the Bhopal disaster, children born without brains outside of the Maquiladoras of Mexico, and the list goes on forever.

When is it enough? When do we stop accepting all of this? When do we stop thanking the technocrats, corporations, and governments for selling us bandages after they take limbs? When do we stop seeing ourselves as victims and start seeing ourselves as the catalysts to take our lives back, to rebuild community, and to reawaken the egalitarian world that has shaped us?

I don't say this to cheapen what many have had to face in our day-to-day reality. Soul crushing things happen to people every single day. We trust machines not to maim us and we should be more surprised when they don't than when they do. We are truly in an abusive relationship with civilization. But at some point, this all comes back to that narrative, that constant retelling of the oldest lie that we've ever known, the lie that is going to be the cause of death for nearly all of us, the lie that I hope, against all logic and likelihood, won't take my daughters from me: that technology and civilization have improved our lives.

It hasn't. It won't.

And if we don't stop it, it will take every last thing that we hold dearly from us and we will continue to thank it, until the moment when we don't and we begin to take our lives back. Up until that very moment when we begin to stake our claim—to resist, to reconnect, to rewild—and fight.

*Any final shout outs for upcoming actions or events or any words of advice for young activists who want to help but don't know where to start?*

I'll go backwards on this one.

I think that this world has increasingly been leaning towards thinking and acting in line with the norms of social media and that's a very, very dangerous move. Google really pulls the reins here and predatory platforms like Facebook follow suit. Our habits and patterns are determined and reiterated through algorithms and scripts: we search and find a reflection of the world that we want to see. That's how you end up with a maniac like Dylan Roof. Tweets and Feeds are our daily affirmations. It all comes full circle when you're posting to this really wide net of people that you loosely affiliate with and then the arguments just go straight to the top shelf level rage. We're just reacting to everything. Removed from the processes of thoughtful interaction, we just share, like, and get so fucking angry all at once.

That's not a healthy means for any kind of development, but the mind is always shifting itself. So the generations growing up with this kind of technology are really doomed, but having this critique of technology doesn't make any of us less a victim of the world that Google maintains. A part of that reality has been this increasing turn towards a for-or-against impulse. We rid out nuance. When I was on Facebook, it's all you would see: everyone has to have an opinion on everything. You really don't! Things can just go on without feeling like you need to react to it.

What ultimately results from that process is this reactionary world where everything is visceral and there is no critical acceptance and engagement. Within the anarchist world, it's become the hip thing to try and develop this perfect theory instead of having the theory be the basis for real world action. We become fodder looking for the perfect idea to be spoon fed in whole so that our position can wash its hand clean of any impurity. What can you do with that? Sound good? Great, where does that get you?

As a whole, we really need to cut off from the social networks. I get that this isn't easy. In fact, if I don't post my projects on the *Black and Green Press* page on Facebook, for most people it's like it never happened. I want to delete that thing so badly, but, just like everyone, I'm still trying to figure out how we get past this. All of our old means of communicating, the mailing lists, the magazines, the journals, all of that is reduced to such a tiny fraction of what it was. It's not like that was perfect before, but we had real world traction. You could have discussions and disagreements and not lose friends

and family over it.

This Interface Revolution, this swift change that put a cell phone into the hands of nearly half the world's population, has made it so that we not only rarely communicate in depth and in person, but that we're increasingly unable to do so. That's a huge social change and an even bigger social issue. Even the major news outlets that remain had to start writing headlines as click bait!

Until we start removing ourselves from those cycles, I'm not sure how much anything else is really going to change. But that needs to be a starting point. We need to have discussions alongside arguments. Not just reactions. We need to engage our minds before they're just the ooze that Google and whatever worse corporation that is coming up behind it will extract money and energy from.

So that's my advice. Shut down your Facebook. Put down your phone. Stop thanking the machines and start seeing what is happening beyond the two or three feet in front of your face. Find that ground and engage it.

We need that first step, because there are far more radical things than that which need to happen.

Outside of that, I mentioned some other projects and campaigns which I strongly encourage following up on and supporting. I can't miss the opportunity to plug *Black and Green Review*, which I'm really excited about. All the things I've been talking about are central for the excellent group of editors that we've assembled and they've all really stepped up in trying to move this along.

I feel like a lot of people are kind of waking up from this spell. Maybe the excitement of the new technologies has or will wane a bit more as it only becomes more apparent that they only prove to be disappointing distractions for what it is that we're all looking so desperately for. I could be wrong, but we have a lot to lose if that doesn't start changing.

Thanks for your time! I hope to cross paths in the forests that reclaim the concrete sooner than later.

# About the Author

Kevin Tucker is a primal anarchist writer, rewilding human, and father. He is the author of *Gathered Remains* (Black and Green Press, 2018) and *The Cull of Personality* (Black and Green Press, 2019). He was the editor of *Species Traitor: an Insurrectionary Anarcho-Primitivist Journal* (2000-2005), founder of the Black and Green Network, was a regular contributor of *Green Anarchy* (2000-2008), and is the founding co-editor of *Wild Resistance: A Journal of Primal Anarchy* (2015-). He hosts the *Primal Anarchy Podcast* and lives in the Ozarks of central Missouri.

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